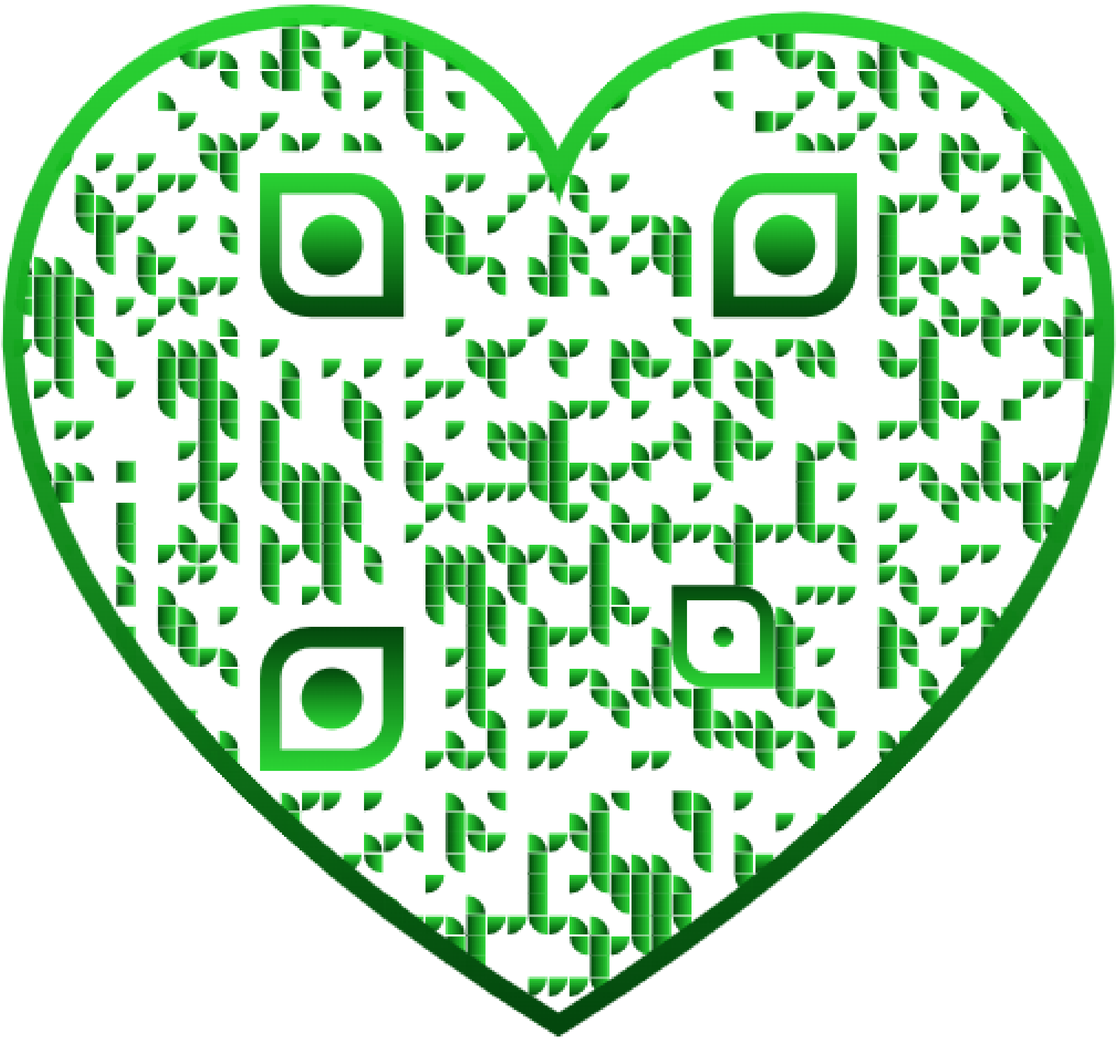
Easy guide to...

ALL YEAR ROUND FLOWERS

Kitchen Garden Amateur GARDENING

Expert advice for gardeners since 1884



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Please note that the free seeds mentioned are not available in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland due to EU regulations. We apologise for any disappointment this causes.

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Contents

Spring

Bulbs....8
Violas....12
Magnolia....14
Clematis....16
Pulmonaria....20
Euphorbia....23
Bergenia....24
Wallflowers....26

Autumn

Bulbs....60
Verbascum....64
Anemone Japonica....66
Rudbeckia....68
Hesperantha....72
Asters....74
Indestructibles....78

Summer

Roses....28
Poppies....33
Irises....34
Alliums....36
Nicotiana....39
Echinacea....40
Dahlia....44
Salvia....46
Peony....48
Lupin....50
Penstemon....52
Cranesbill....54
Hemerocallis....56
Cosmos....58

Winter

Camellia....82
Viburnum....84
Hellebore....86
Scent....88
Cyclamen....91

Groundwork

Containers....107
No dig....110
Pruning....112
Propagation....114
Wildlife....118
Edible flowers....120

INTRODUCTION

Our gardens, with their backdrop of changing seasons, offer the perfect canvas for creativity. A varied climate, from crisp winters to (occasionally!) sunny summers, presents both challenges and opportunities for gardeners aiming to achieve year-round colour.

This book is your companion to transforming your outdoor space into a garden that delights in every season. We'll explore a diverse palette of plants suited to our climate, from steadfast evergreens that provide structure and winter interest, to the cheerful bursts of spring bulbs and the rich colour tapestry of summer perennials.

You'll discover how to combine plants for continuous interest, pairing early-flowering shrubs like Forsythia and Camellias with late-season stars such as Asters and Chrysanthemums. We'll also delve into the often-overlooked world of foliage, where variegated leaves, bronze tints, and silver accents can add depth to your borders. Learn how the considered positioning of plants like Heucheras and ornamental grasses can provide movement and subtle colour, even on grey winter days.

Colour isn't just about flowers and leaves, though. We'll explore how bark, berries, and seed heads can contribute to your garden's year-round appeal. You'll find tips on incorporating these elements to create a garden that's as captivating in December as it is in June.

We'll cover essential gardening techniques too, from the art of pruning to promote healthy growth and plenty of flowers, to the science of soil preparation that underpins all successful planting. You'll also learn about propagation, allowing you to multiply your favourite plants and share the joy of gardening.

Whether you have a sprawling country plot or a compact urban balcony, this book will inspire you to make the most of your space. We'll provide practical advice for different garden sizes and types, helping you create a vibrant outdoor area that suits your needs and lifestyle.

So, grab your gardening gloves, and let's get started on planning, planting and maintaining a garden that creates interest and colour throughout the year, whatever the weather!

ALL YEAR ROUND FLOWERS

Spring time joy

The first flowers and scents of spring herald the start of a new year and exciting opportunities

✿ Bulbs ✿ Violas ✿ Magnolia ✿ Clematis ✿ Pulmonaria ✿ Euphorbia ✿ Bergenia ✿ Wallflowers

Spring bulbs

Plant: autumn

Position: full sun

Hardiness: -15°C

One of the easiest ways to bring fresh colour and form to your spring garden is by planting bulbs

What signals the arrival of a new year more than the first sight of a crocus peeping its colourful head out, yellow daffodils nodding in the wind, or multi-coloured tulips emerging from a sea of foamy Forget-me-nots? The classics are just that, but there are plenty of other options to choose from when it comes to early-flowering bulbs.

Tulips, daffodils, crocuses, hyacinths, snowdrops and *Iris reticulata* need a cold period to stimulate flowering. Their development is triggered by temperature, so what can we do if there's no cold weather? One option is to chill the bulbs in the fridge for 6-8 weeks. Another is to plant them in shady places or move pots into shady corners so they are less affected by unseasonally mild winter weather.

With tulips, opt for variety! There are many different varieties, and some will be better suited to a warmer garden than others, such as the Darwin hybrids developed by Lefeber in Holland. These flower in mid- to late-spring, for up to five years if left in the ground or pot, and are also good for naturalising.

Another option is to choose late-flowering varieties such as 'Queen of the Night', 'Menton', 'Dreamland', and 'Dordogne', but their flowering period may be shortened if the early spring is dry and warm. As well as

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS ALAMY UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

Top tip

Species bulbs, with just Latin names, increase by seed, so don't deadhead *Scilla siberica* or *Tulipa sprengeri* – let them seed. If the bulb has a name in quotation marks, it is a hybrid so seedlings will vary. Most named daffodils should be deadheaded after flowering choosing hybrids that will return for a few years, another option is to go for perennials and choose species rather than hybrid tulips.

Tulipa clusiana and *Tulipa tarda* will naturalise and create a display that will last many years and multiply. These are much shorter in height, so they are better suited to rockeries and the front of borders.

Amaryllis, paperwhites (*Narcissus tazetta*), freesias and *Anemone coronaria* can grow and flower without a pronounced cold period, although they may still benefit from cooler temperatures.

PLANTING

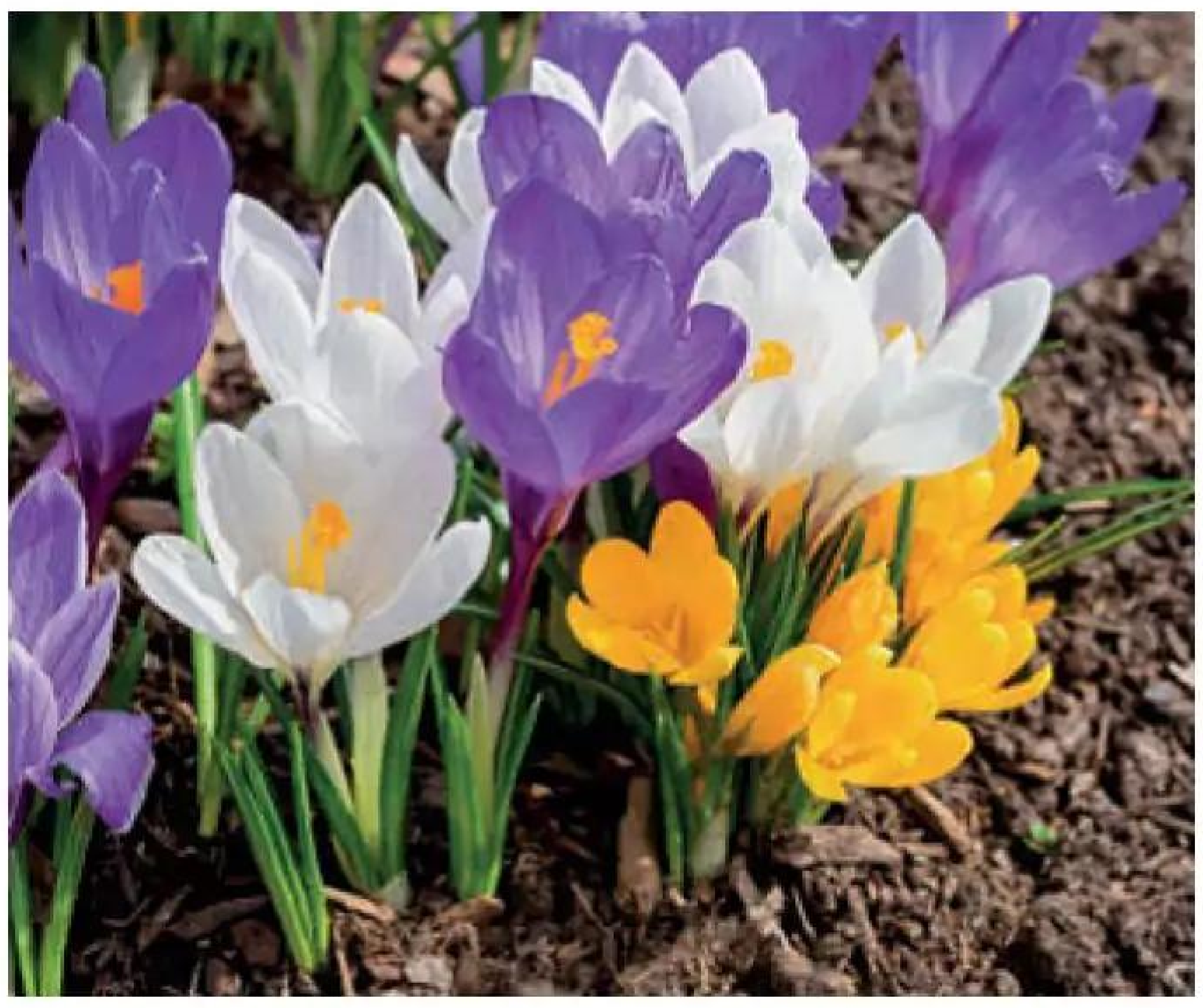
Bulbs thrive in fertile, free-draining soil. If you have heavy soil that is water-retaining, either plant bulbs in containers or dig in grit and lots of well-rotted manure or compost to open up its structure and improve drainage. Thin and chalky soil may drain well, but it loses nutrients fast, so it will also benefit from added well-rotted organic matter and a scattering of chicken manure pellets.

Most bulbs like a sheltered patch of sun or light shade. Read the packet to see how high they will grow and plant them at the front, middle or back of your borders accordingly.

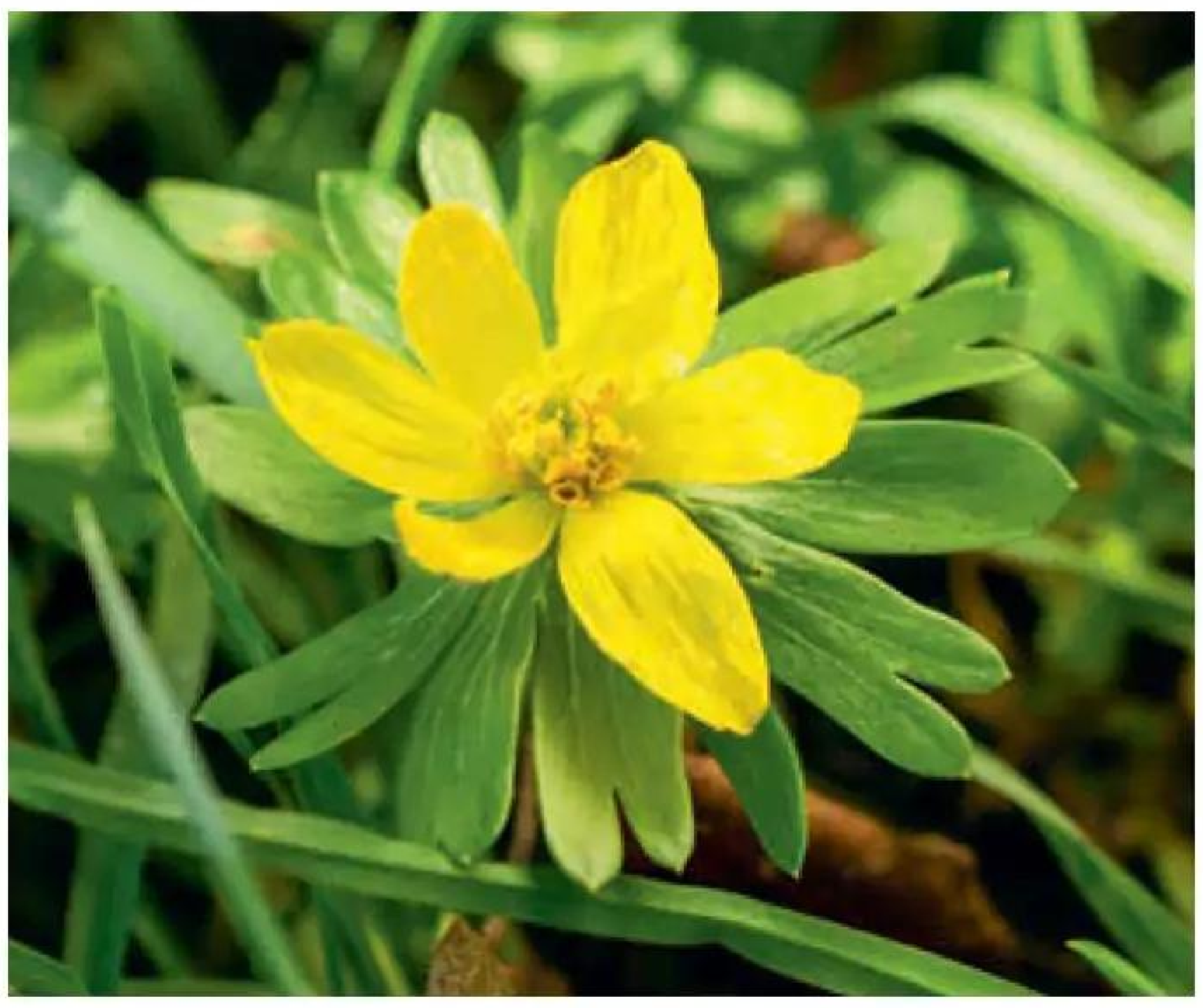
New bulbs should be firm and have a healthy sheen, so discard any that feel soft and look dull. When planting, space them one bulb's width apart and at a depth of two to three times their height, with their pointed end upwards.

Don't forget... Boldly coloured Ranunculus (Persian buttercup) can be grown in clumps in perennial borders for an eye-catching display in late spring. Pink and pastel varieties look like peonies, there are picotees with stripes, and semi-double and double varieties

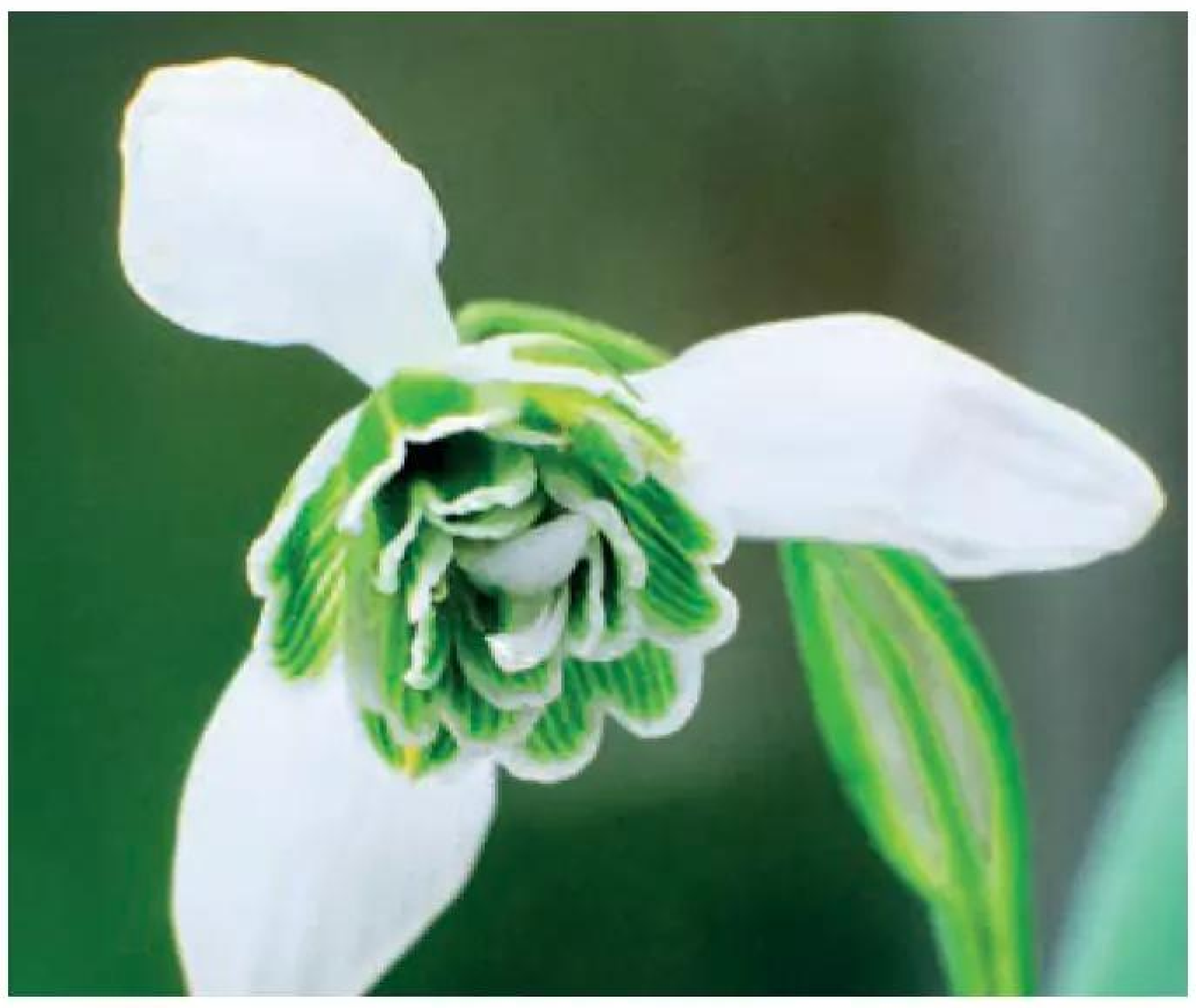
A SPLASH OF COLOUR



Crocus
White, purple or gold, early flowering crocus provide little goblets of colour. They look good in pots or as drifts in borders, and some species naturalise well in lawns. **HxS:** 4x4in (10x10cm) **Flower colour:** Yellow, white, purple, lilac **Plant:** Full sun. Buy potted or put in corms during autumn.



Winter aconite *Eranthis hyemalis*
Sunny yellow blooms set off by rich green ruffs. Carpet-forming when planted together. Can be tricky to establish but it's worth persevering. **HxS:** 3x2in (8x5cm) **Flower colour:** Yellow **Plant:** Partial shade. Introduce pot-grown plants in February or 'in the green' after flowering.



Snowdrop *Galanthus elwesii* 'Grumpy'
The green markings give this little snowdrop a delightful grumpy face. Plants are slow to multiply in the ground. Flowers mid to late winter. **HxS:** 7x3in (17x8cm) **Flower colour:** White **Plant:** Full sun/partial shade. Sow seed when ripe or divide after flowering.

HUES OF BLUE

Dwarf iris *Iris reticulata*
Blooms from February, or earlier if brought on under cover. It thrives in well-drained neutral or slightly alkaline soils in sunny or partially shaded locations. **Size:** Up to 15cm (6ins) **Spread:** Up to 10cm (4ins) **Flower colour:** Shades of blue, purple and white **Plant:** Buy pot-grown or plant bulbs from September to November.

Allium 'Globemaster'
Blooms with large, long-lasting flowerheads in an attractive shade of violet-purple. It's a great performer with tidier leaves than most other alliums. **Size:** Up to 1m (39ins) **Spread:** 10-50cm (4-20ins) **Flower colour:** Violet-purple **Plant:** Plant bulbs in autumn for spring and early summer flowering.

Squill *Scilla siberica*
Enjoy the dainty blue flowers from March. Will grow in semi shade, and create bold drifts in full sun. Siberian squill is extremely robust. It grows in acid, alkaline or neutral soils. **Size:** Up to 20cm (8ins) **Spread:** Up to 5cm (2ins) **Flower colour:** Blue **Plant:** September to November.

A TRIO OF TULIPS

ALAMY

'Apricot Beauty' AGM
"Flowers well in shade" says tulip expert Sarah Raven. Scented, too. **Type:** Early single. **Good for:** 'Antique' flower arrangements. **Planting partners:** Wallflowers including the hard-to-find peachy red 'Aurora'. **Height:** 45cm (18in).

'Dreamland' AGM
Large, white flowers stained rosy-red at the edges of the petals, the pink taking over from the white as the flowers mature. **Type:** Single late. **Good for:** Large containers, late-spring seasonal displays. **Planting partners:** Tall, blue forget-me-nots, **Height:** 60cm (24in).

'Queen of Night'
Famously sultry, the rich-maroon egg-shaped flowers are almost black and are probably the darkest of all. Instantly captivating. **Type:** Single late. **Good for:** A gift for new gardeners. **Planting partners:** White honesty, white wallflowers, white or lilac single late tulips. **Height:** 60cm (24in).

Top tip

Plant bulbs like *Narcissus poeticus* or *Leucojum* vernum in moist, well-drained soil to ensure they thrive. Avoid cutting back the foliage too early, as the leaves help store energy for next year's blooms. Leave them to die back naturally before tidying

ALTERNATIVE PLANTING OPTIONS

Bulbs flourish in containers

If you only have a small plot or garden on heavy, sticky clay that tends to hold on to moisture, your best bet may be to grow bulbs in patio containers. This also partly ensures that if there's any question mark over their hardiness, you can make adjustments to get them through the winter. You can move them to more sheltered areas, and if they're in plastic or recycled pots, you can plunge them into borders or larger containers in the spring.

Bulbs are planted the same way as in the soil – a bulb's width apart and at three times their own depth – in the compost of your choice. It is also a good idea to top the pots with gravel mulch to protect the bulbs from pests and improve drainage. For winter, stand the pots against a sheltering wall or in an unheated greenhouse and raise them up on feet to let excess water drain away.

Grow in grass

You want the cluster of bulbs to look as natural as possible, so throw a handful on the grass and plant where they fall. Dig a hole for the bulb and plant it twice as deep as its height, with the pointed end upwards.

Return the removed soil over the bulb and replace the grass plug on the top. Water well and mark the planting area. The bulbs will flower next spring, and the clump will multiply and improve over the years as the bulbs mature and spread.

It pays to deploy a pest deterrent such as pepper spray or wire mesh fastened down, as squirrels love to dig up and snack on bulbs.

Bulb success

Good care will work wonders

- Deadhead regularly so the plant puts its energy into bulb growth rather than creating seeds.
- Let the leaves die down naturally and never knot them, as it will reduce the chances of good flowering next year.
- Remember to water and feed bulbs after flowering so they will bulk up for next year.

Tulips

Tulips are available in almost every colour and a wide range of forms, from single to double and fringed. Their tall flower stems lift the blooms above underplanting, and they are equally at home planted in drifts in borders as they are in containers and pots.

They break down into five main groups.

✿ **Early single tulips** Flowers open on relatively short and sturdy stems in late March and April.

✿ **Mid-season tulips** Compact, with strong stems, essential between the early and late varieties. (16-20in).

✿ **Darwin hybrid tulips** Featuring the largest flowers of the classically shaped tulips in late April and May.

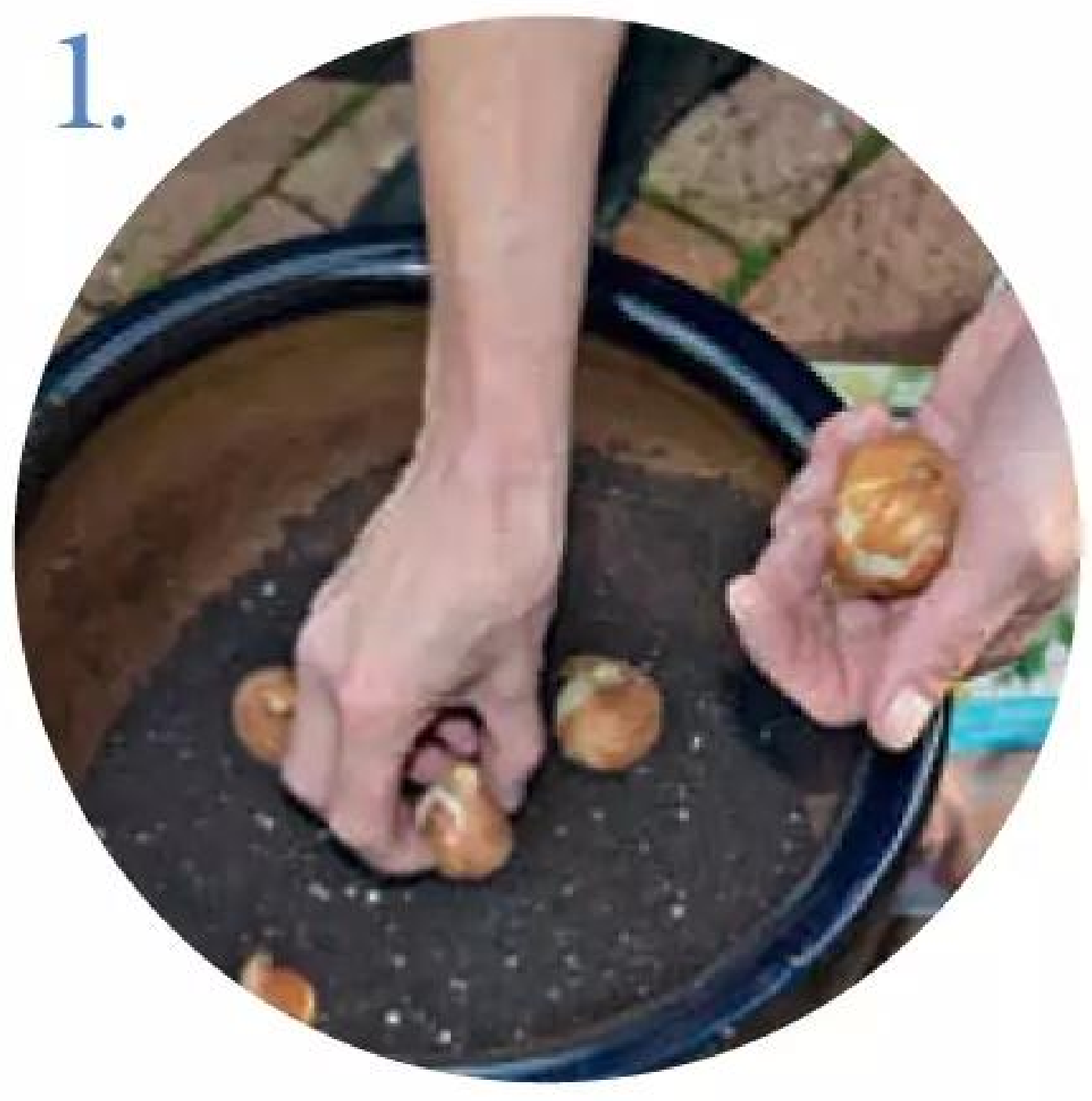
✿ **Lily-flowering tulips** With pointed petals arching outwards at the tips, these early and mid-May varieties are stylish

✿ **Single late (May-flowering) tulips** Flowering through May, are best in a sheltered site.

How to... Make 'bulb lasagne'

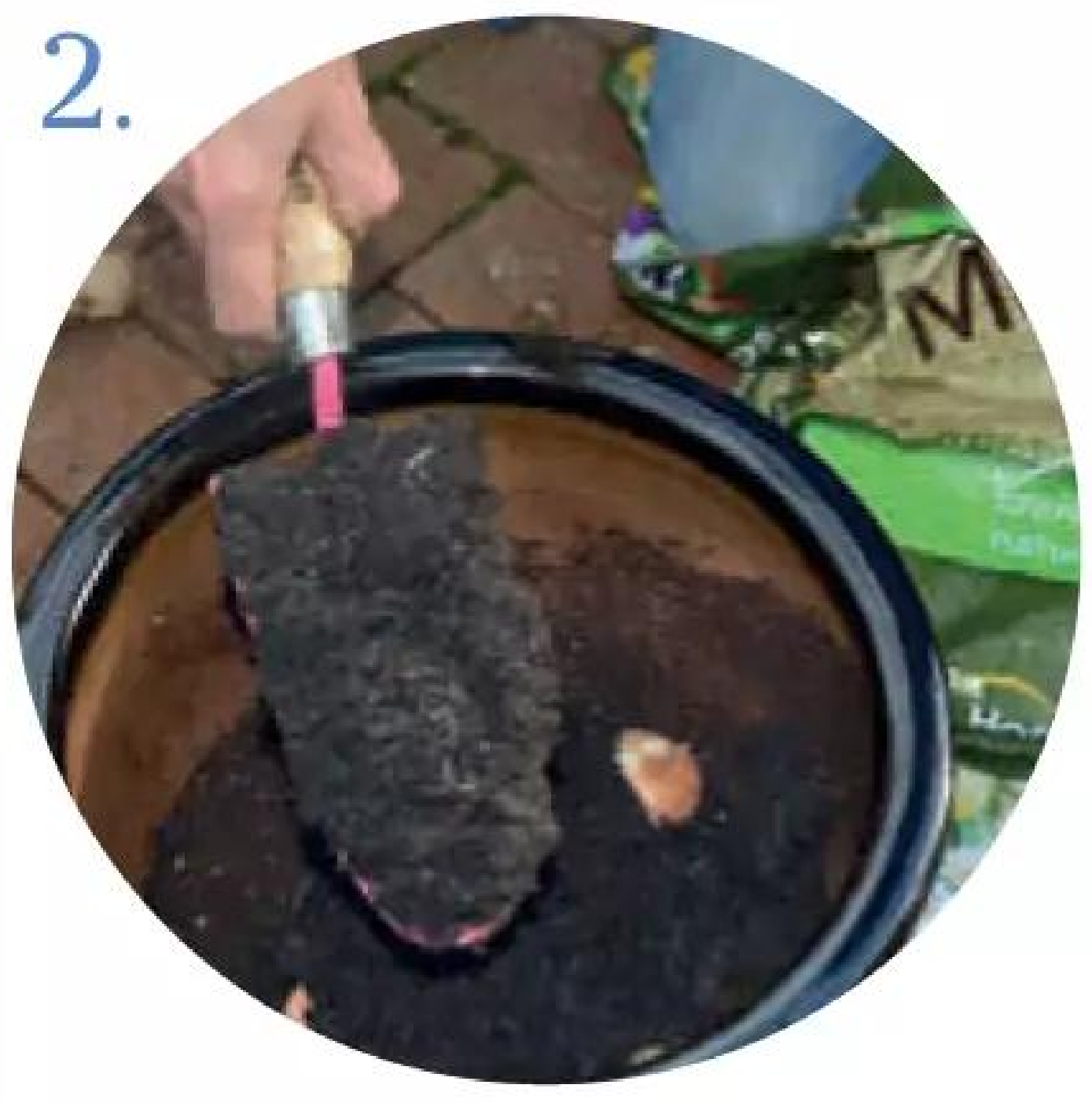
Layer different varieties of bulbs to create a long-lasting display. For example, you could plant the lowest layer of traditional, large daffodils or later-flowering tulips, cover them in compost and add a layer of smaller bulbs such as miniature daffs or anemones. The top layer of bulbs should be the earliest to flower and could include snowdrops, aconites or crocus. Mulch the top with gravel and place it somewhere sheltered for winter, then move it to a sheltered, sunny spot in spring.

1.



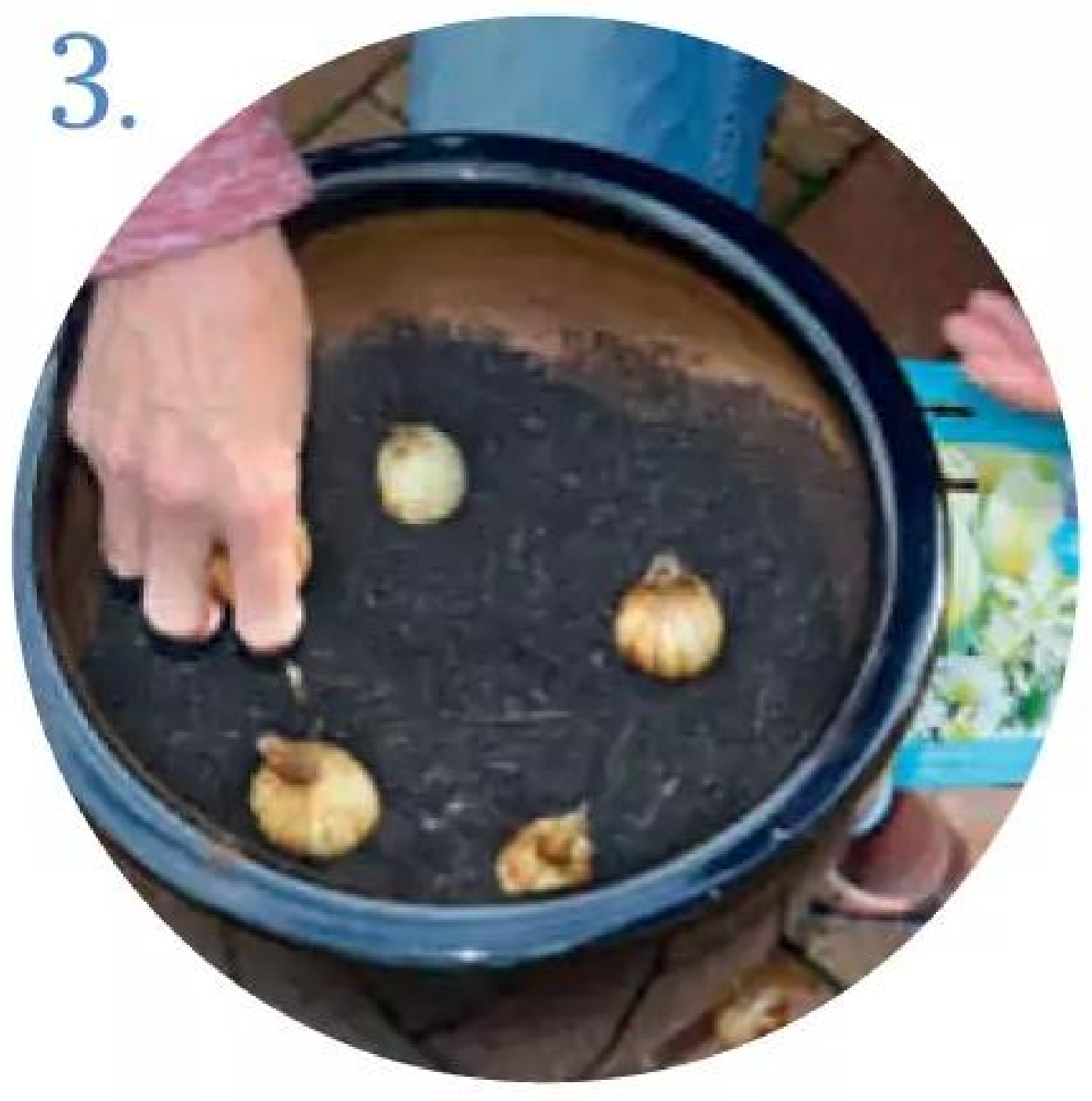
Place crocks and a layer of container compost or bulb fibre in the pot and add the first bulbs – in this case, tulips.

2.



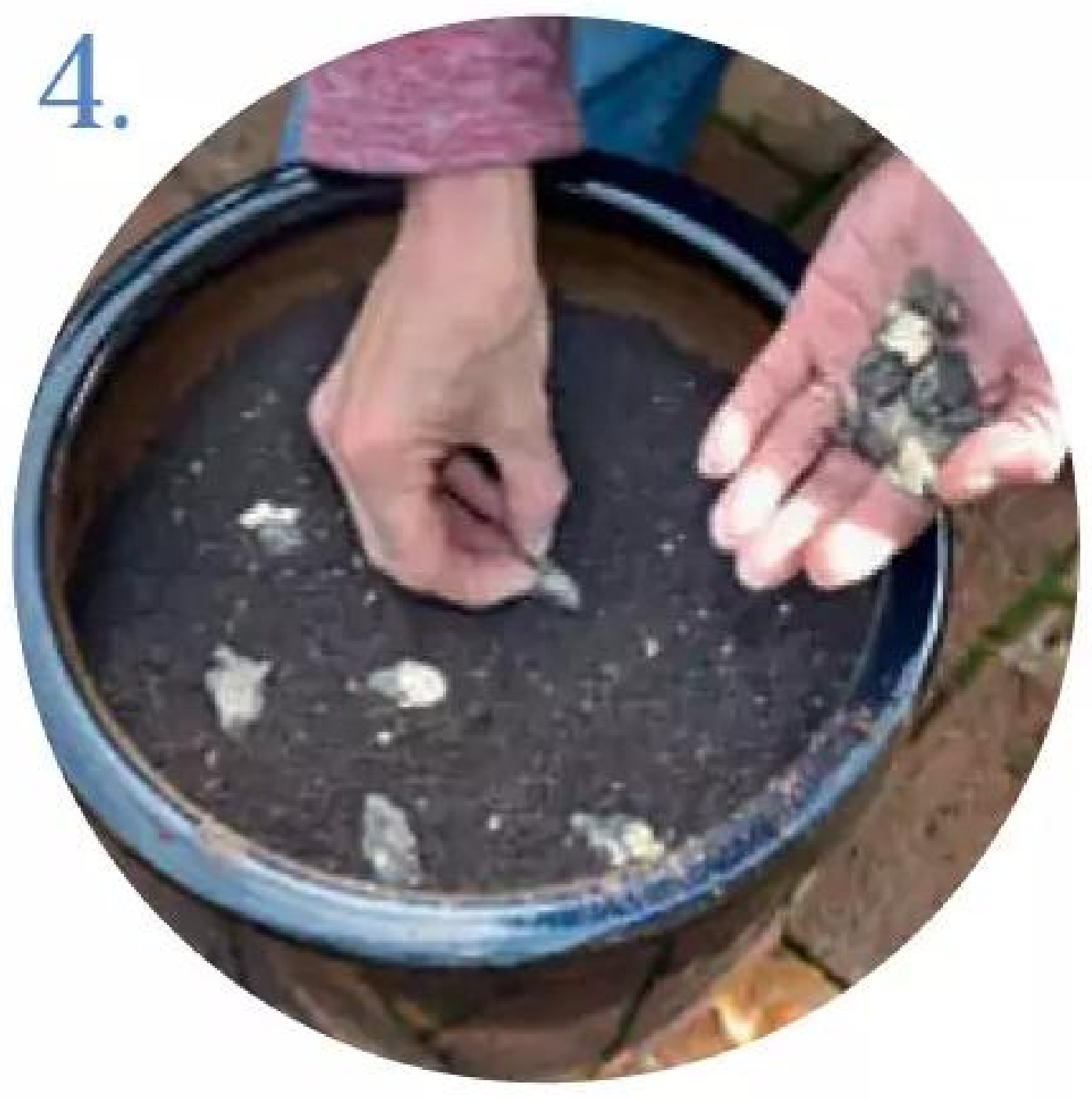
Cover the bulbs with compost. Container compost and bulb fibre will provide the bulbs with good drainage and nutrition.

3.



Add more compost and position the second layer of bulbs (narcissi here). If possible, avoid placing them directly above the first bulbs.

4.



Anemone nemorosa (wood anemone) is the final layer. Top the pot with compost, water it and raise it on feet.

Pansies

Viola

Plant: spring-autumn

Position: full sun/partial shade

Hardiness: -20 °C

Propagate: late winter/early spring

From big and blowsy to small and delicate, violas are good value plants for all seasons

The little smiling faces of winter pansies and violas are so cheerful. Their bold, multi-coloured, easy-to-grow flowers brighten up front porches, flowerbeds, doorstep pots, winter baskets, and window boxes.

Pansies, violas, and violettas belong to the plant genus *Viola* (which also contains violets), but there are important differences between them. What's commonly referred to as pansies are cultivars of *V. x wittrockiana* with large, usually unscented flowers. These are either biennials or short-lived perennials used as container and bedding plants. In the 1800s, this was bred with other species, predominantly 'heartsease' or wild pansy (*V. tricolor*), leading to the creation of at least 400 named varieties by the start of the 20th century.

By contrast, the tufted or Victorian violas were bred from two evergreen perennial species, the mountain pansy (*Viola lutea*) and the horned or Pyrenean pansy (*V. cornuta*). These little beauties appeared around 1860. The resulting cultivars are compact, hardy perennials, generous in bloom, producing rounds of beautifully coloured and often fragrant flowers from April to September. Of variable growth habits, some are neat and upright for containers, while others are taller for borders and will scamble through surrounding plants.

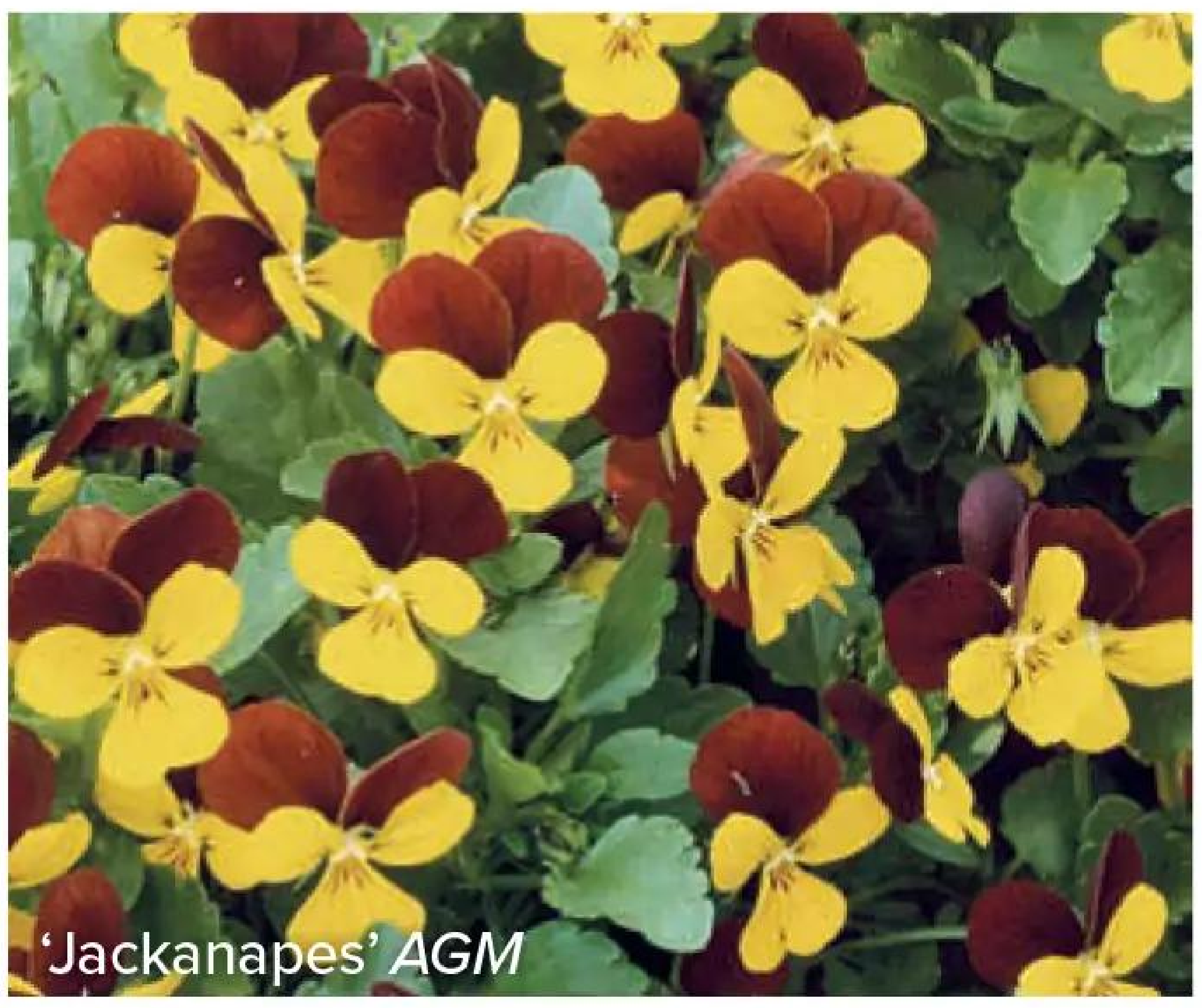
ADOBE

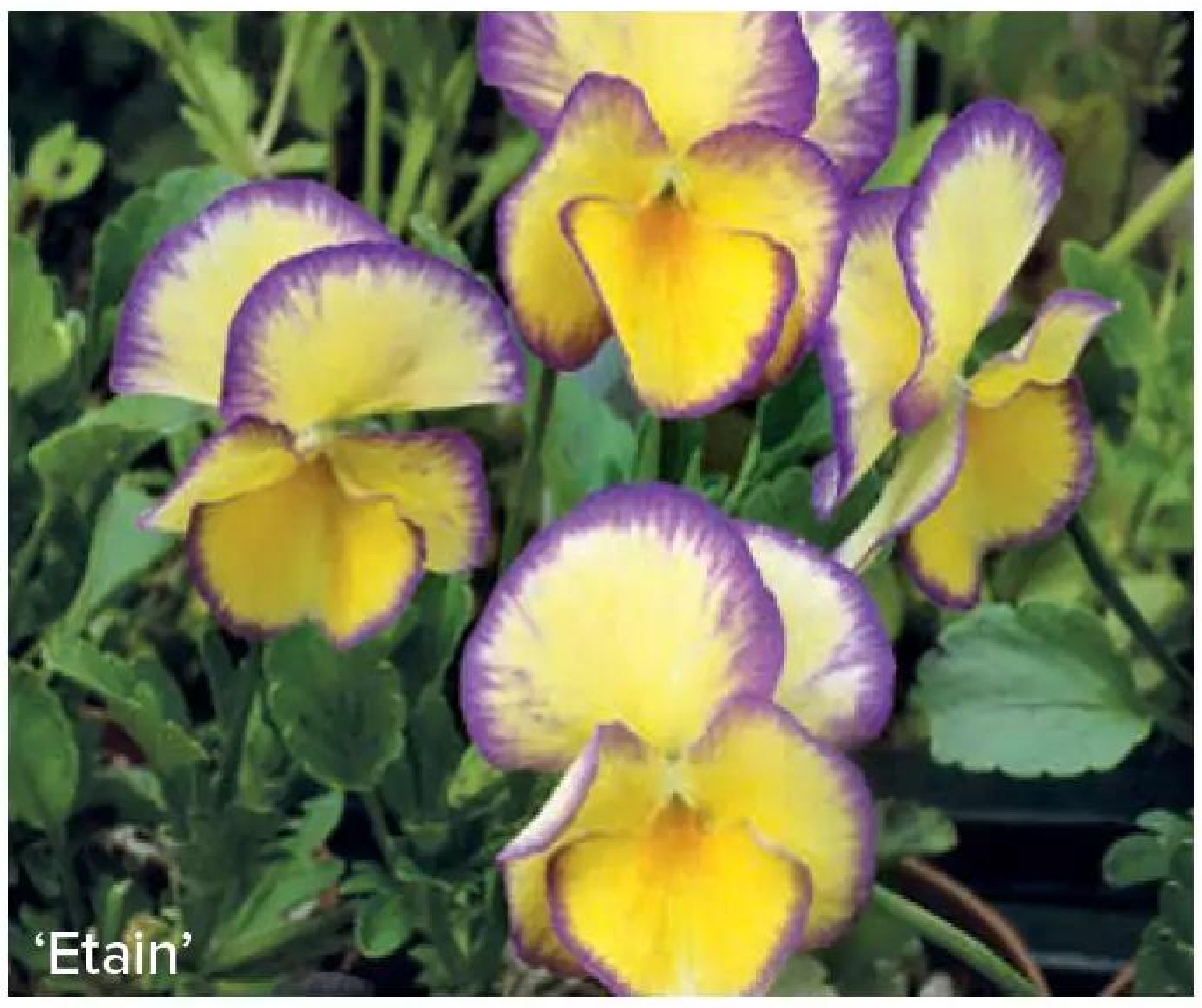
Did you know...

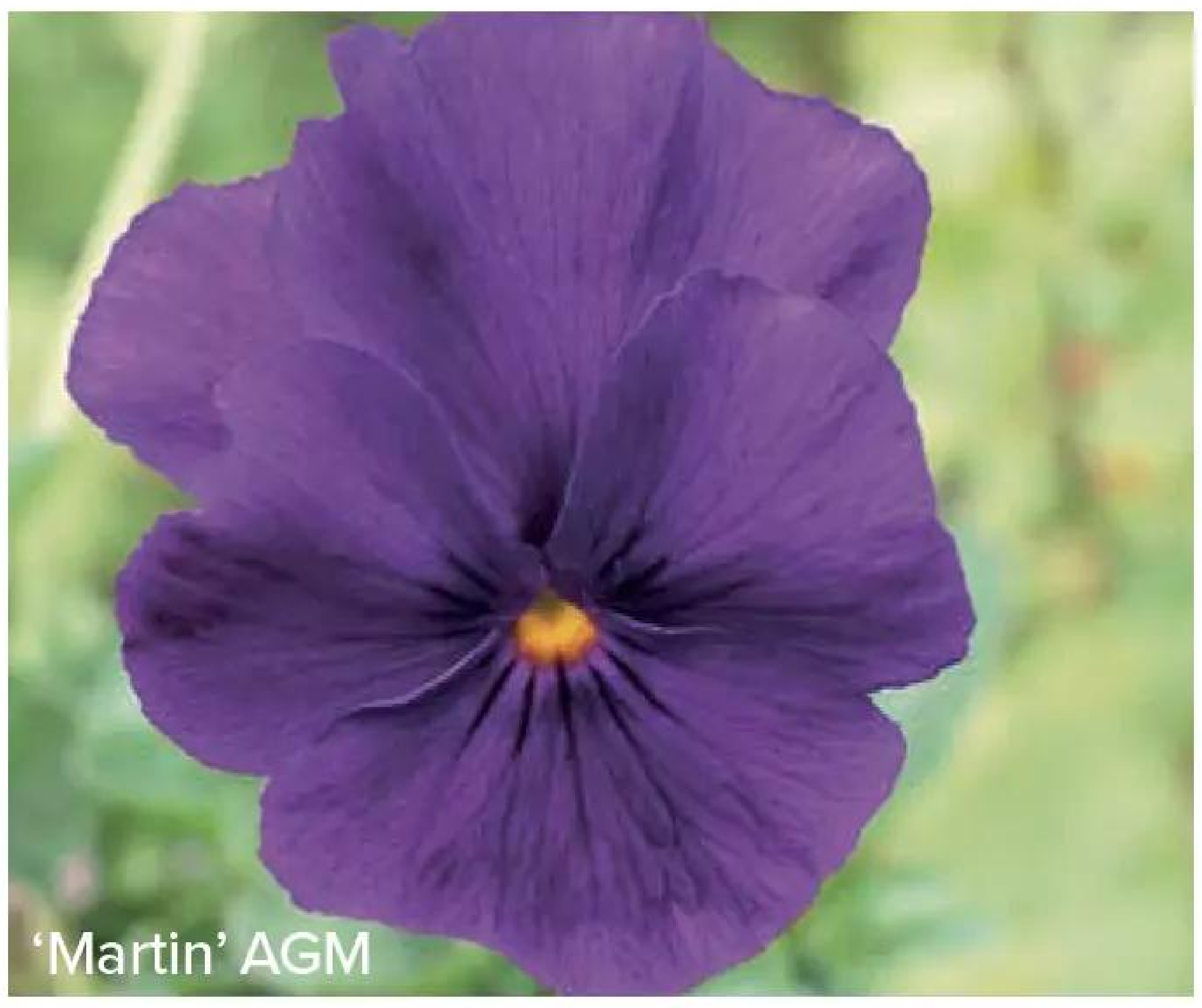
The name 'pansy' derives from the French word pensée meaning 'thought'. It was so named because the flower resembles a human face

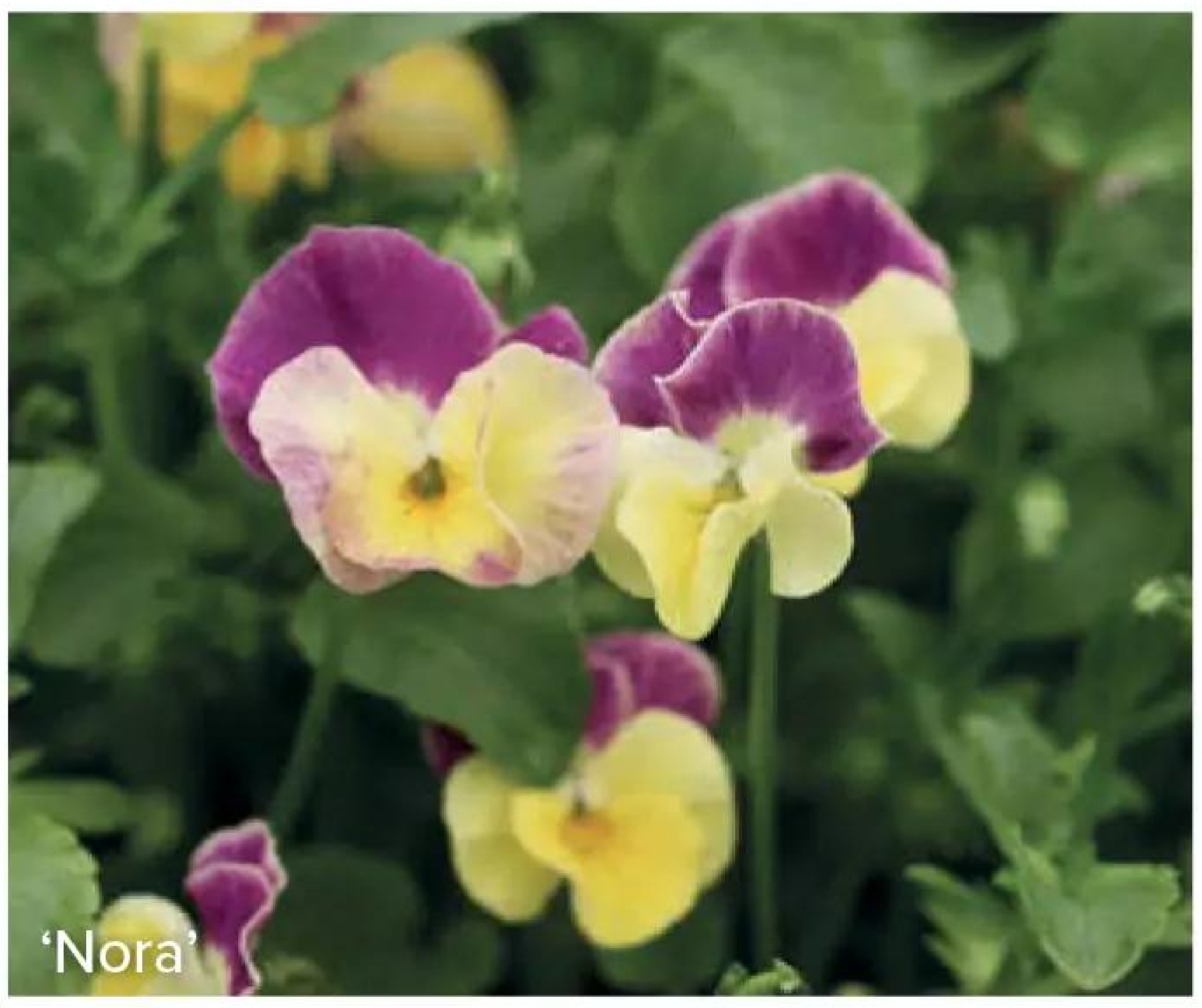
Top tips

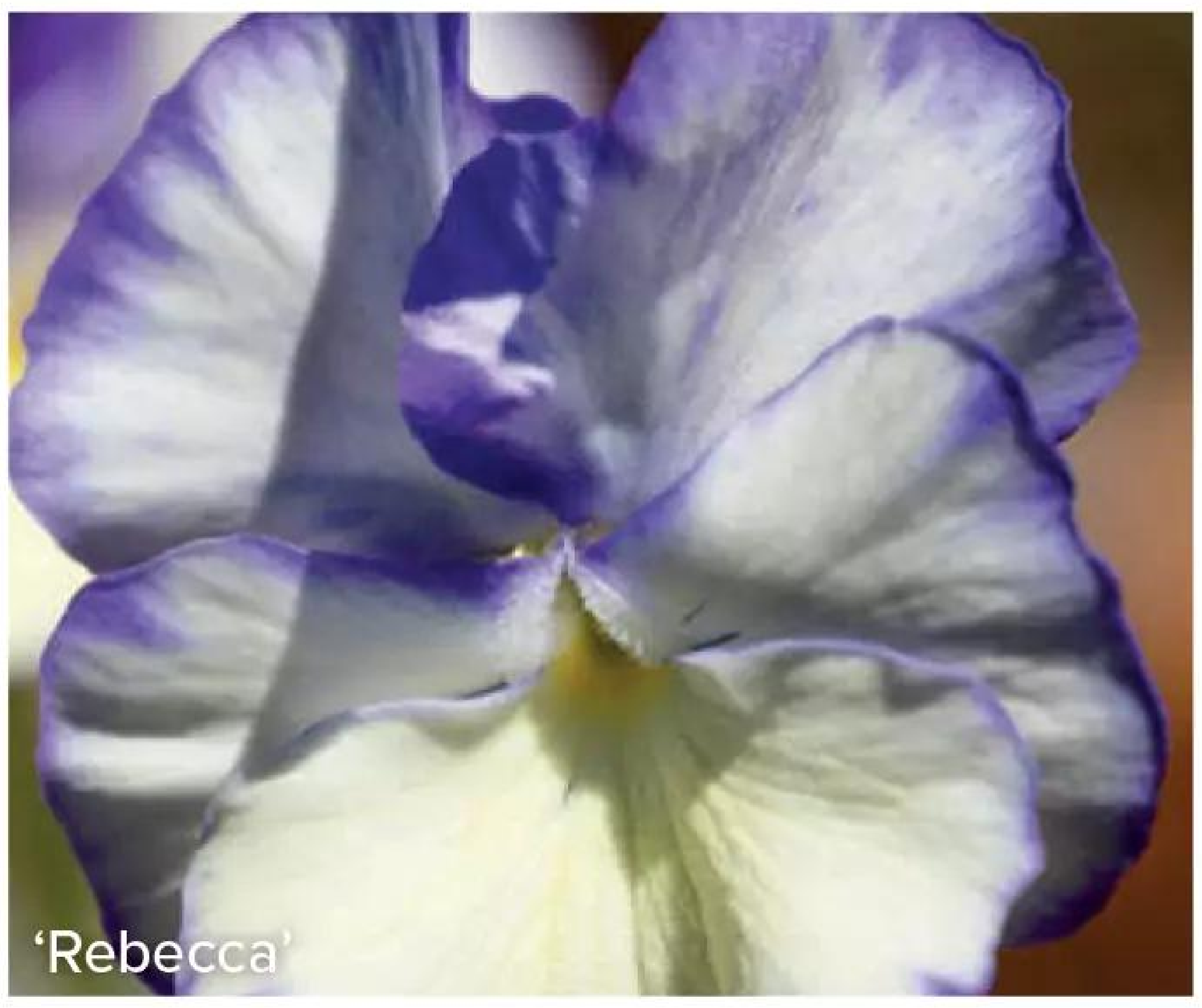
- Today's varieties are divided based on flower size. Pansies have flowers around 2-3in (5-7.5cm) across, while violas are much smaller.
- There are spring, summer and autumn versions, and some are scented.
- Cut back after flowering, and apply a general-purpose liquid feed.

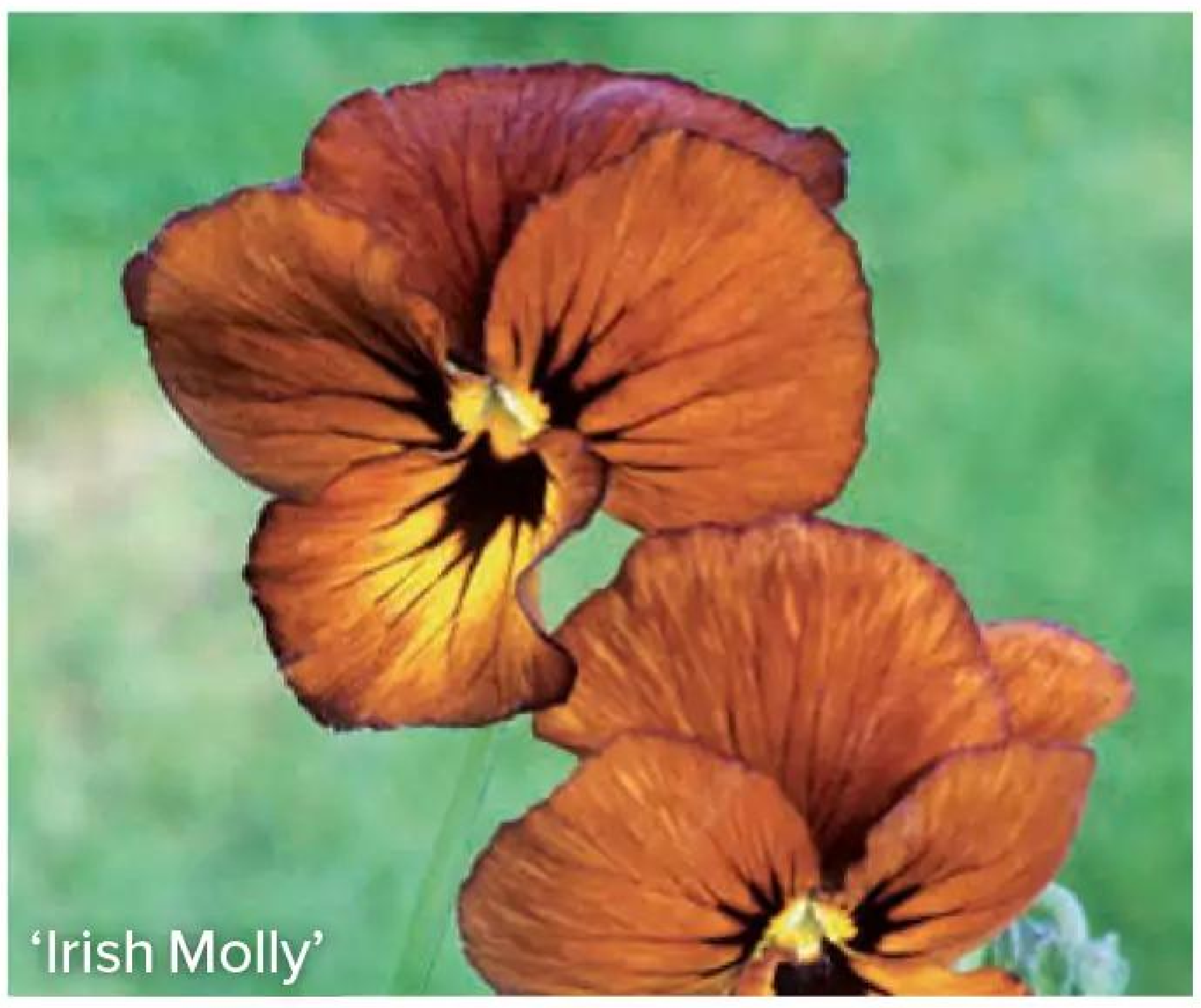

'Jackanapes' *AGM*

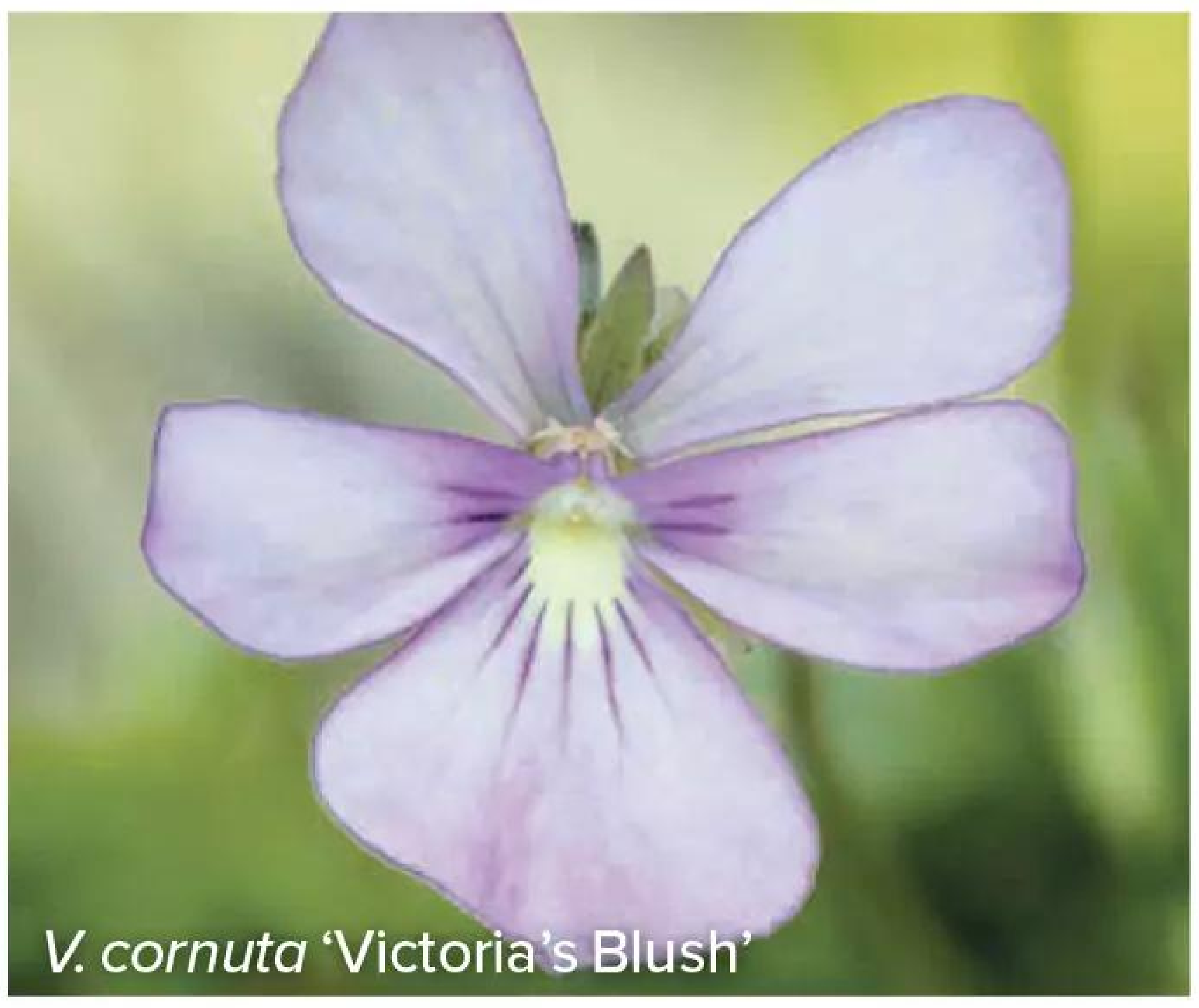

'Etain'

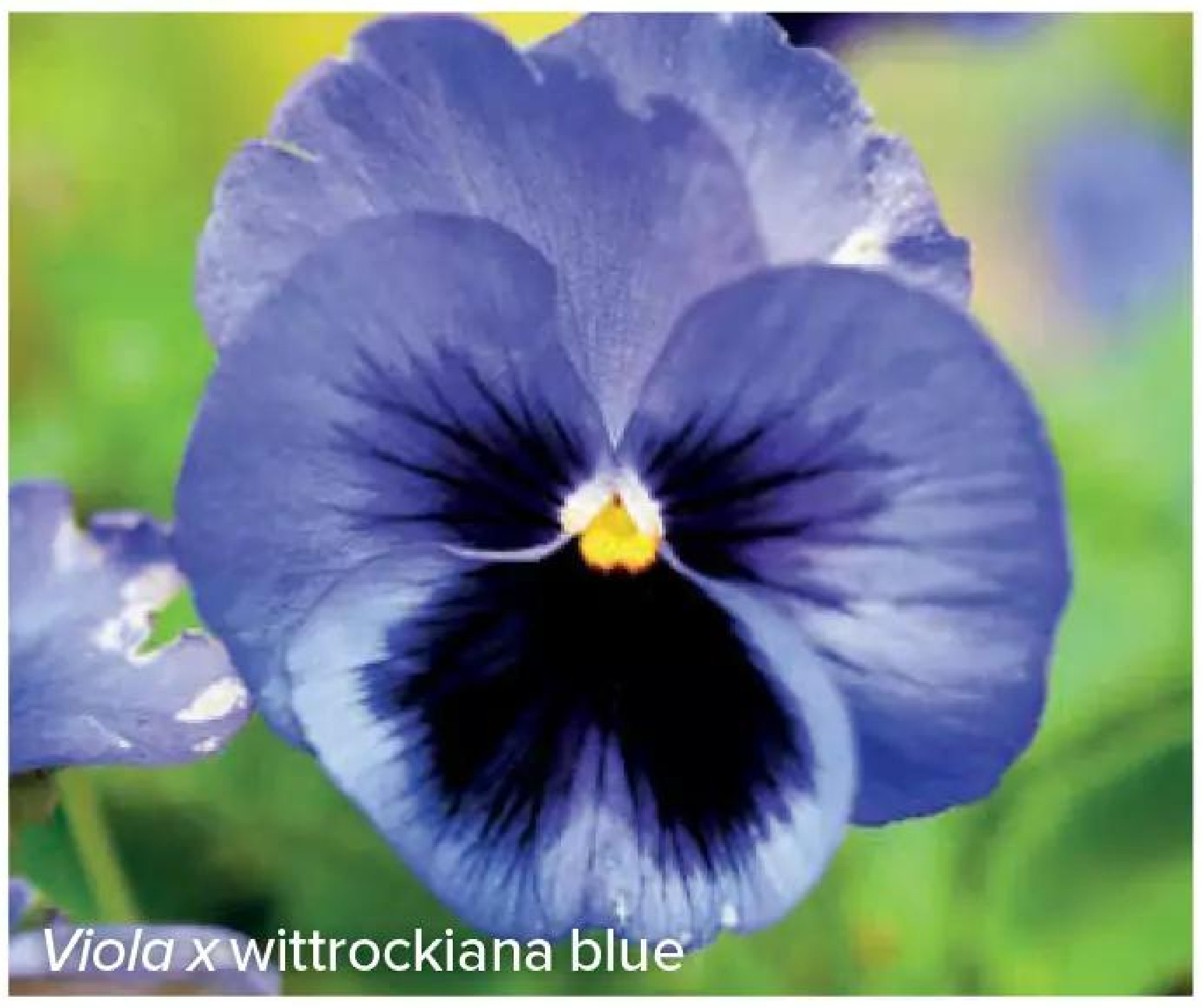

'Martin' AGM

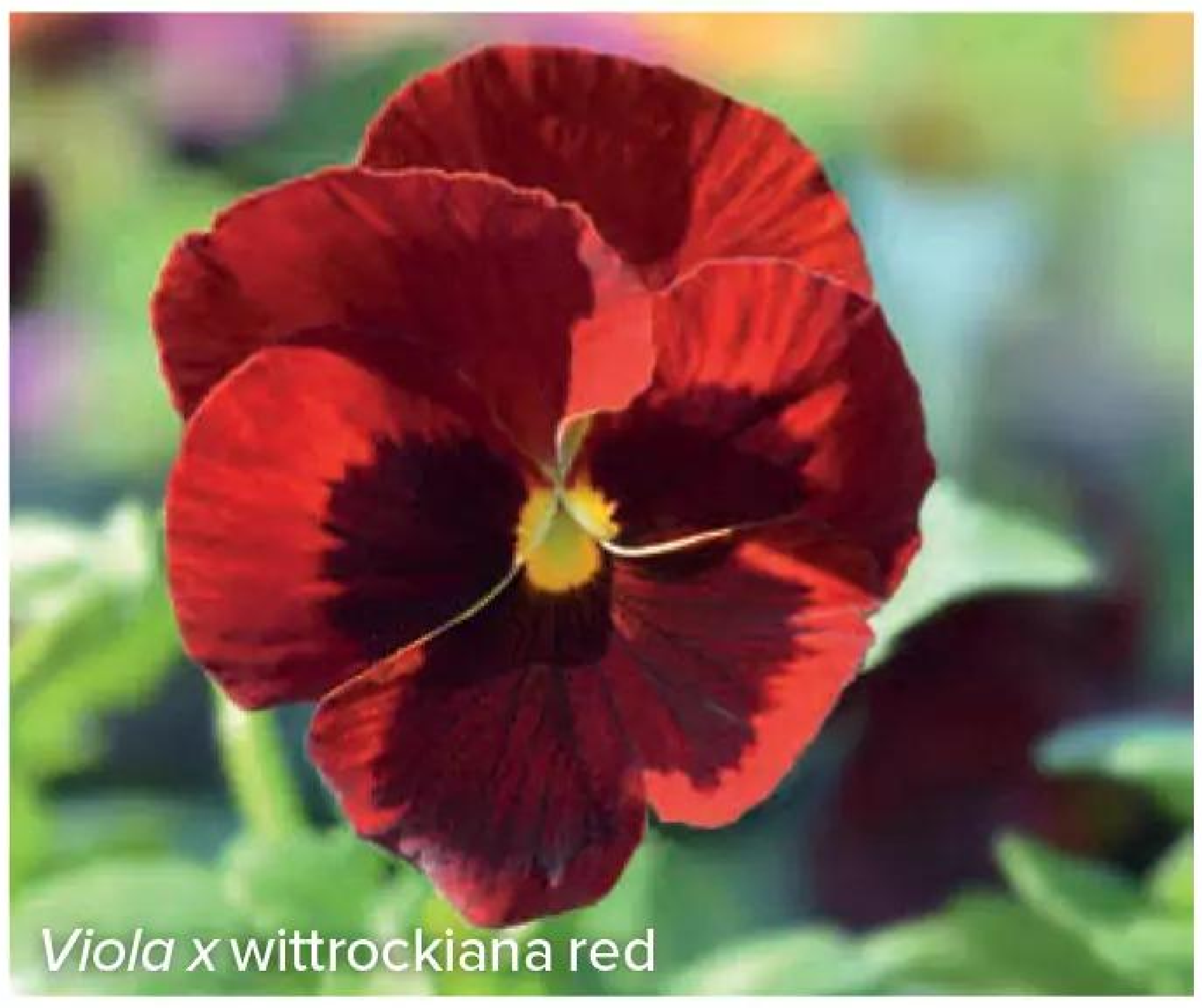

'Nora'


'Rebecca'


'Irish Molly'


V. cornuta 'Victoria's Blush'


Viola x wittrockiana blue


Viola x wittrockiana red

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** Shop-bought late winter and spring pansies and violas should be planted in their flowering positions immediately. They thrive in any reasonable garden soil and love being in the sun, but don't allow them to dry out. Plant them where you can view them with the light behind you, as their flowers follow the sun's path, ensuring they face you. Bicoloured and heavily blotched varieties are ideal for containers and along paths, where their delicate patterns can be admired. Plainer types are best planted en masse in beds and borders.

✿ **Planting:** Sow seed under cover in February to April to flower from late spring to autumn. For autumn and winter flowering, sow seed from May to July.

✿ **Deadheading:** Regular deadheading is crucial. As soon as the flowers fade, use your thumb and forefinger, or scissors, to nip them off. Watch out for downy mildew, which causes pale blotches and fuzzy grey mould on leaves, eventually leading to the whole leaf dying. Remove infected leaves promptly, and avoid growing pansies on the same soil for three years to prevent contamination.

Pests and diseases

Downy mildew causes pale blotches and fuzzy grey mould on pansy and viola leaves, leading to leaf death. Remove infected leaves immediately and avoid growing them in the same soil for three years. Keep an eye out for aphids, which can spread viruses, and slugs and snails that may damage young plants.

Magnolia

Magnoliaceae

Plant:
October-April

Position:
sun/light shade

Hardiness:
-15 °C

Propagate: spring-
late autumn

With stunning flowers, scent and great foliage, magnolias are a must-have

Magnolias boast the largest flowers and individual leaves among trees and shrubs hardy to the UK. If you have the space, these spectacular trees are perfect for filling a garden corner with vibrant colour.

Cultivars of the saucer magnolia (*Magnolia × soulangeana*) are commonly seen. Their large, waxy, goblet-shaped flowers in white, cream, pink, or wine-coloured shades cover the branches in mid-spring. However, these trees can spread and grow large, and careless pruning to restrict their size often ruins their shape and flowering ability. Cultivars include 'Satisfaction' (deep pink fading to cream, faintly scented), 'Alba Superba' (early flowering with pure white blooms), 'Lennei' (rosy-purple outside, white inside, sometimes with a second autumn bloom), and 'Rustica Rubra' (vigorous with rich rosy-red blooms).

The star magnolia (*M. stellata*), a slow-growing shrub from Japan, is frequently seen. 'Royal Star' is highly recommended, with pale pink buds opening to bright white, sweetly scented flowers in early spring. For pure white blooms, *M. salicifolia* 'Wada's Memory' is outstanding, forming a small, spreading tree with large, scented flowers.

Hybrid magnolias like 'Daphne' (rich yellow flowers), 'Betty' (clear red-purple blooms), and 'Pegasus' (pure white, candle-like flowers) are also noteworthy.

Magnolia soulangeana 'Triumphans'

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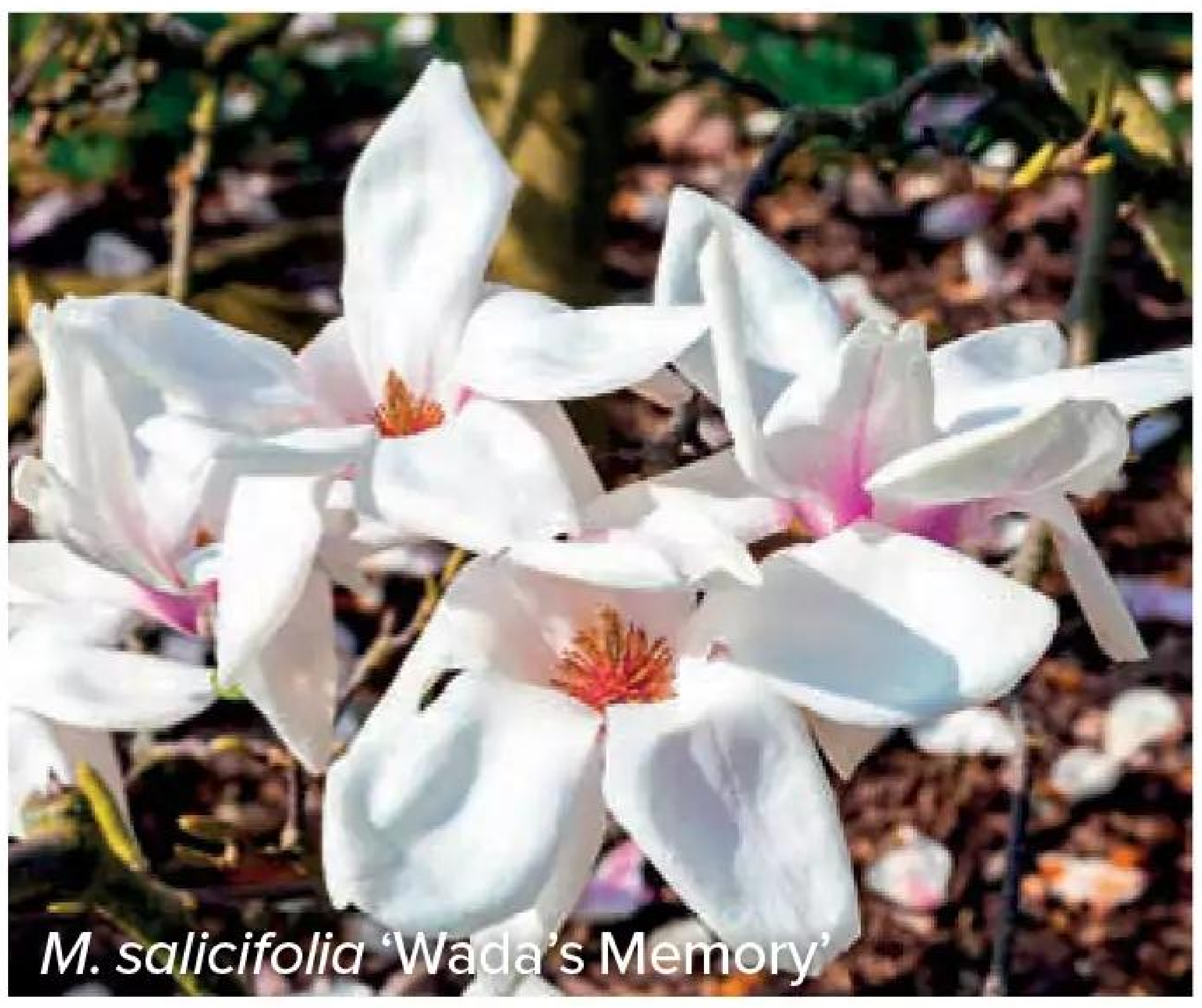
By season

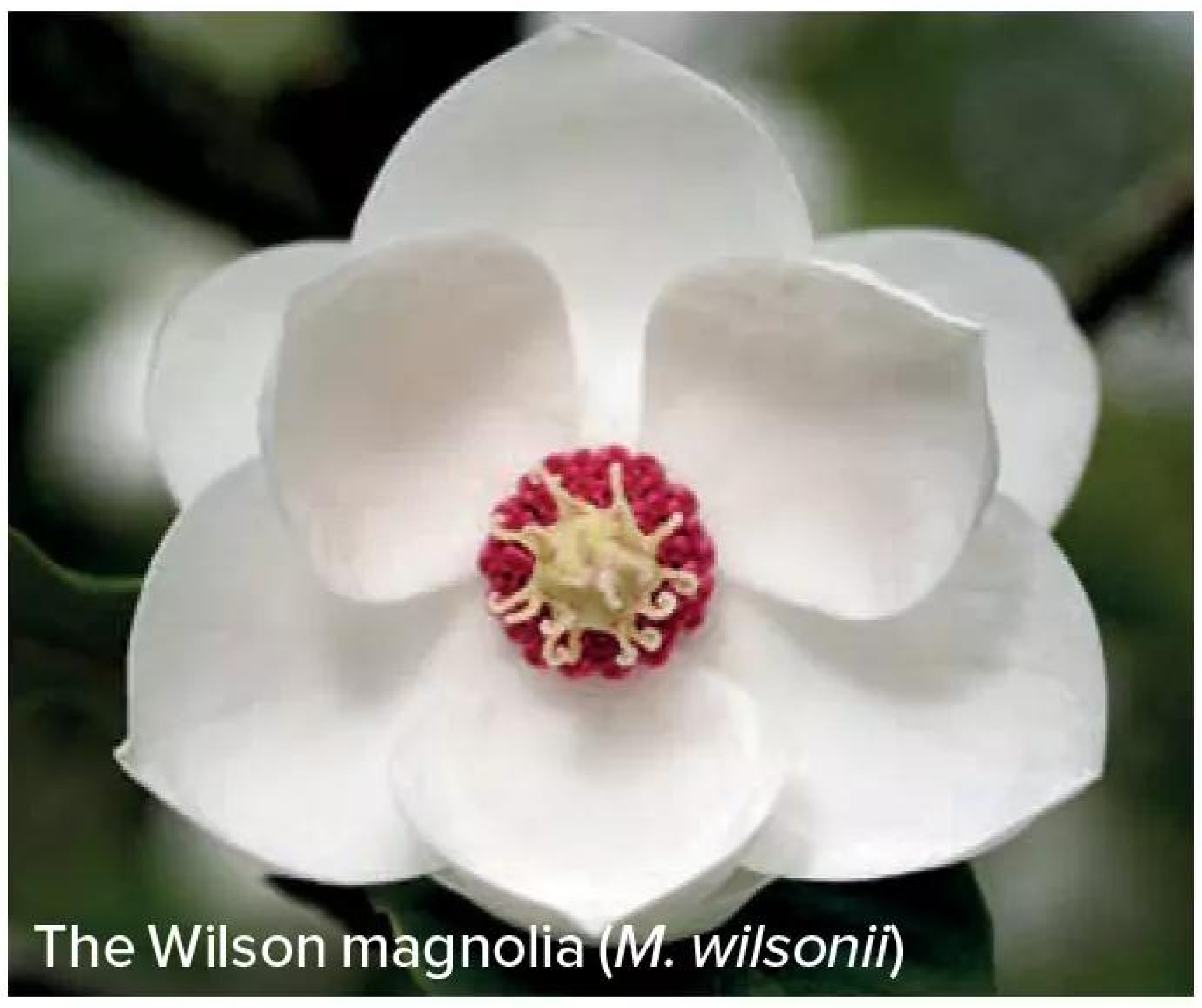
Early-flowering: *Magnolia × loebneri* has big, starry white or pink flowers in early spring, which are less susceptible to damage from wind and frost than other spring-flowering magnolias with larger blooms.

Mid-season: 'Elizabeth' has a compact habit, and the flowers are elegant and slender in bud, opening to cup-shaped blooms of clear primrose-yellow. Blooms open before the leaves.

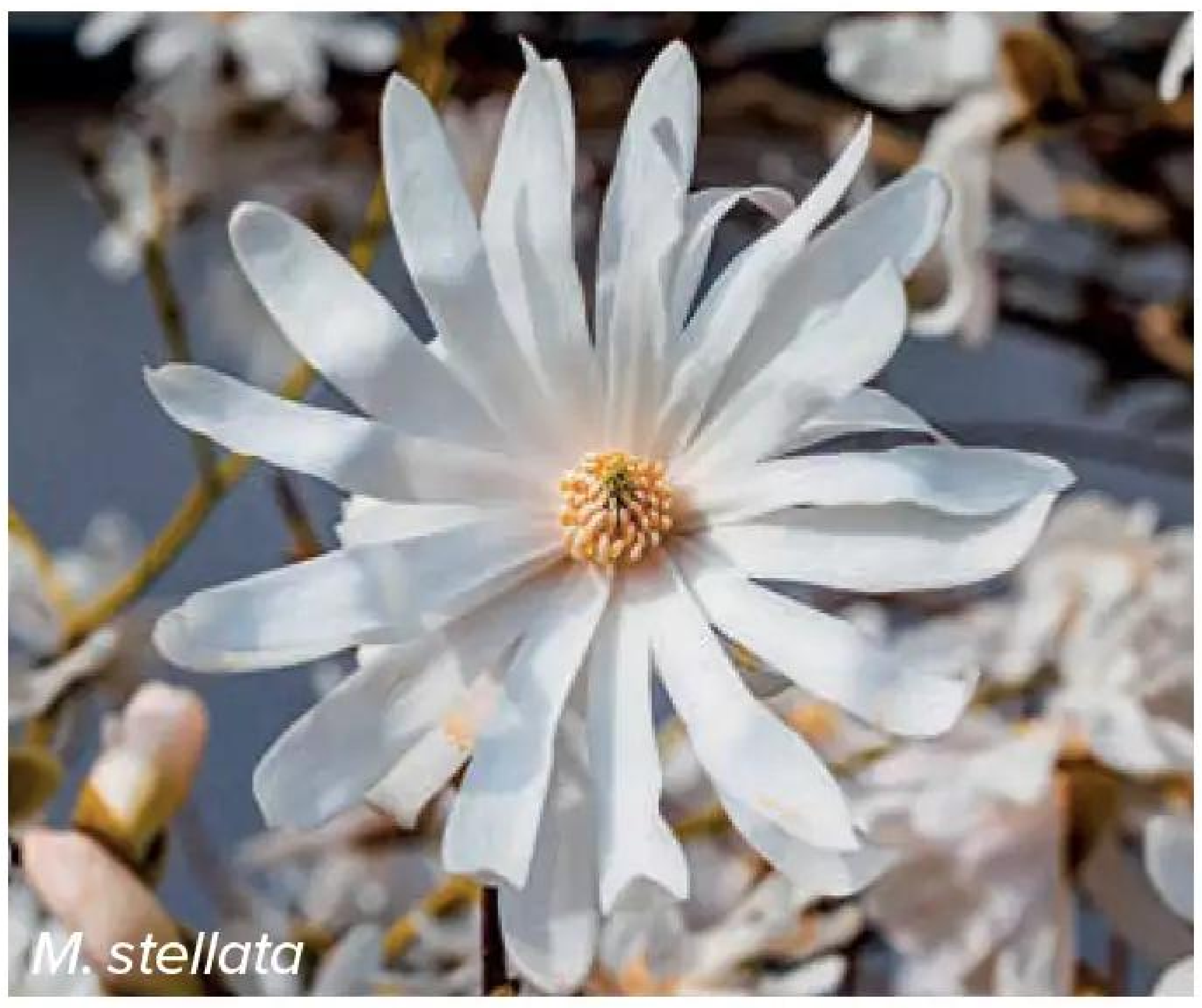
Late-flowering: *M. grandiflora* flowers in summer/autumn and has large, dark green leathery leaves with reddish brown underneath. The creamy white flowers are large and fragrant. Needs shelter, preferably against a wall. 'Exmouth' and 'Goliath' flower early.



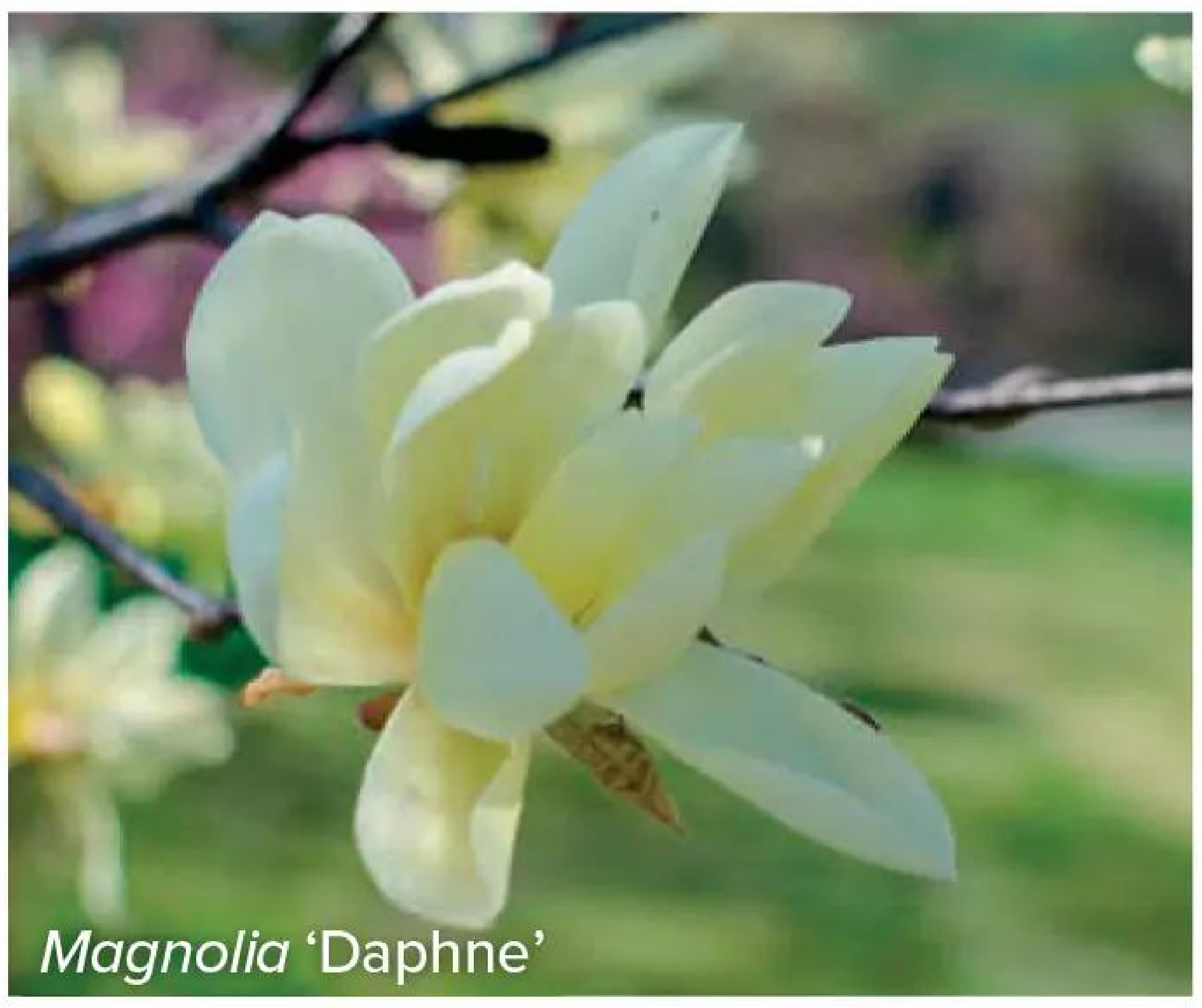
M. salicifolia 'Wada's Memory'



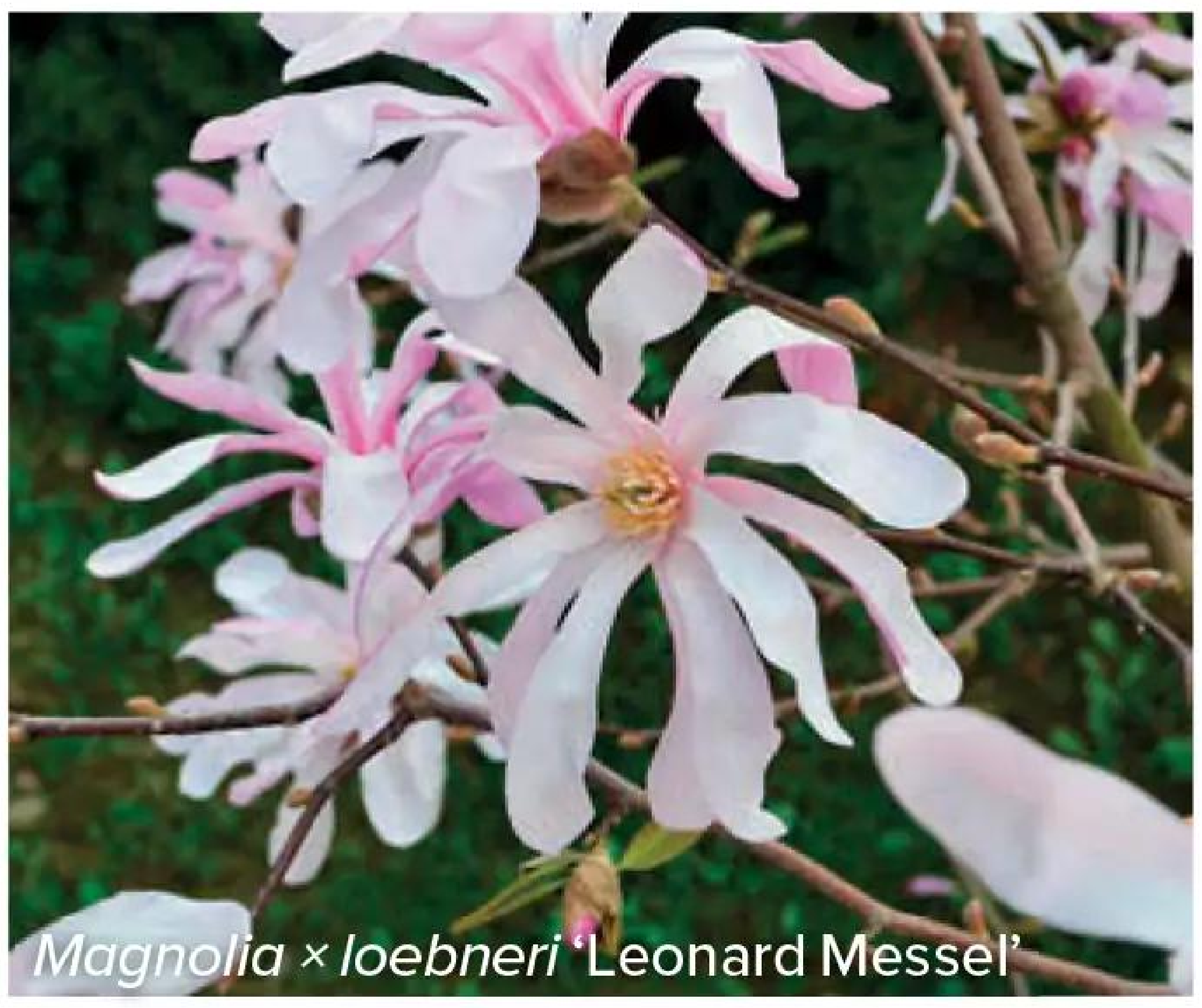
The Wilson magnolia (*M. wilsonii*)



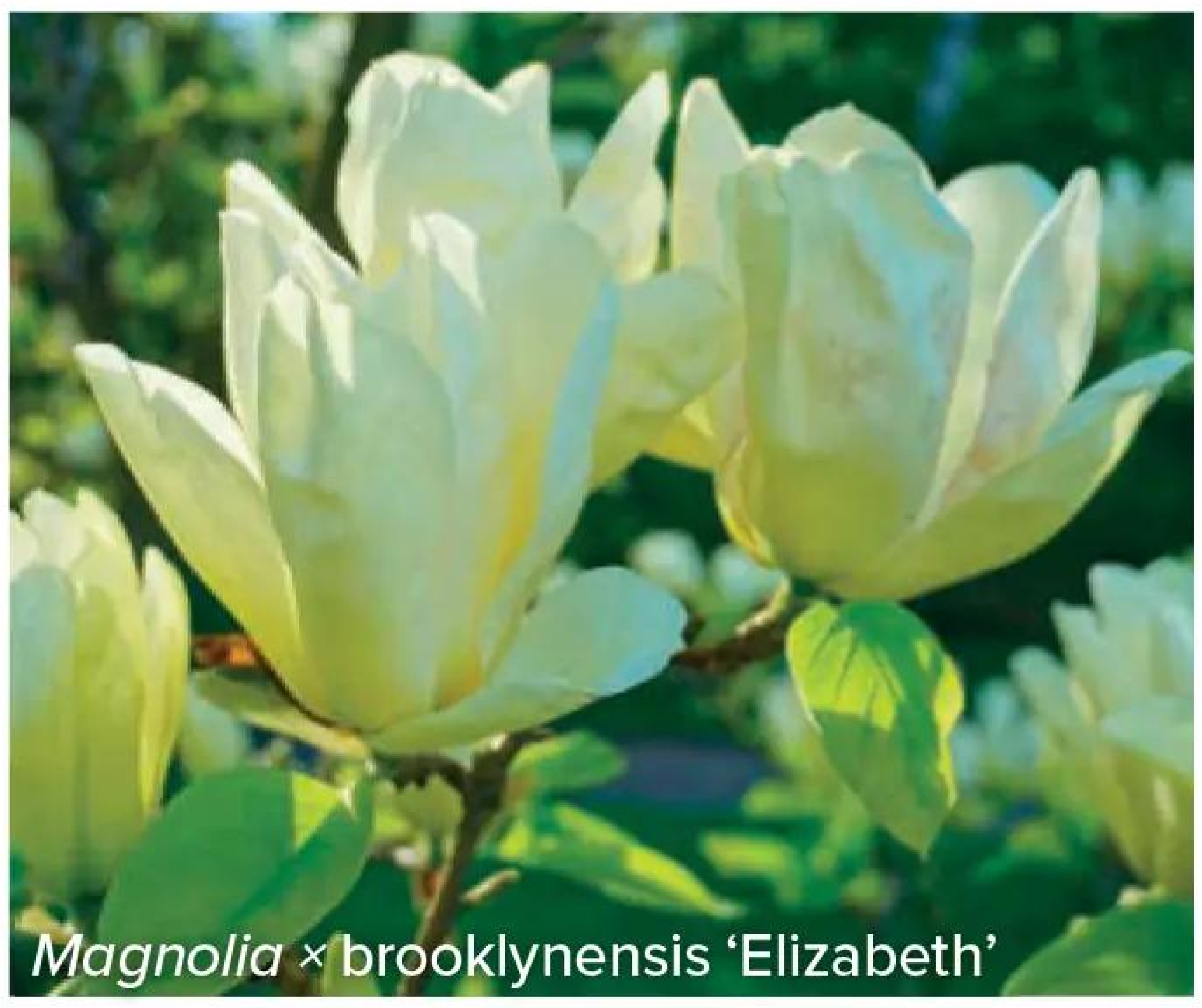
M. stellata



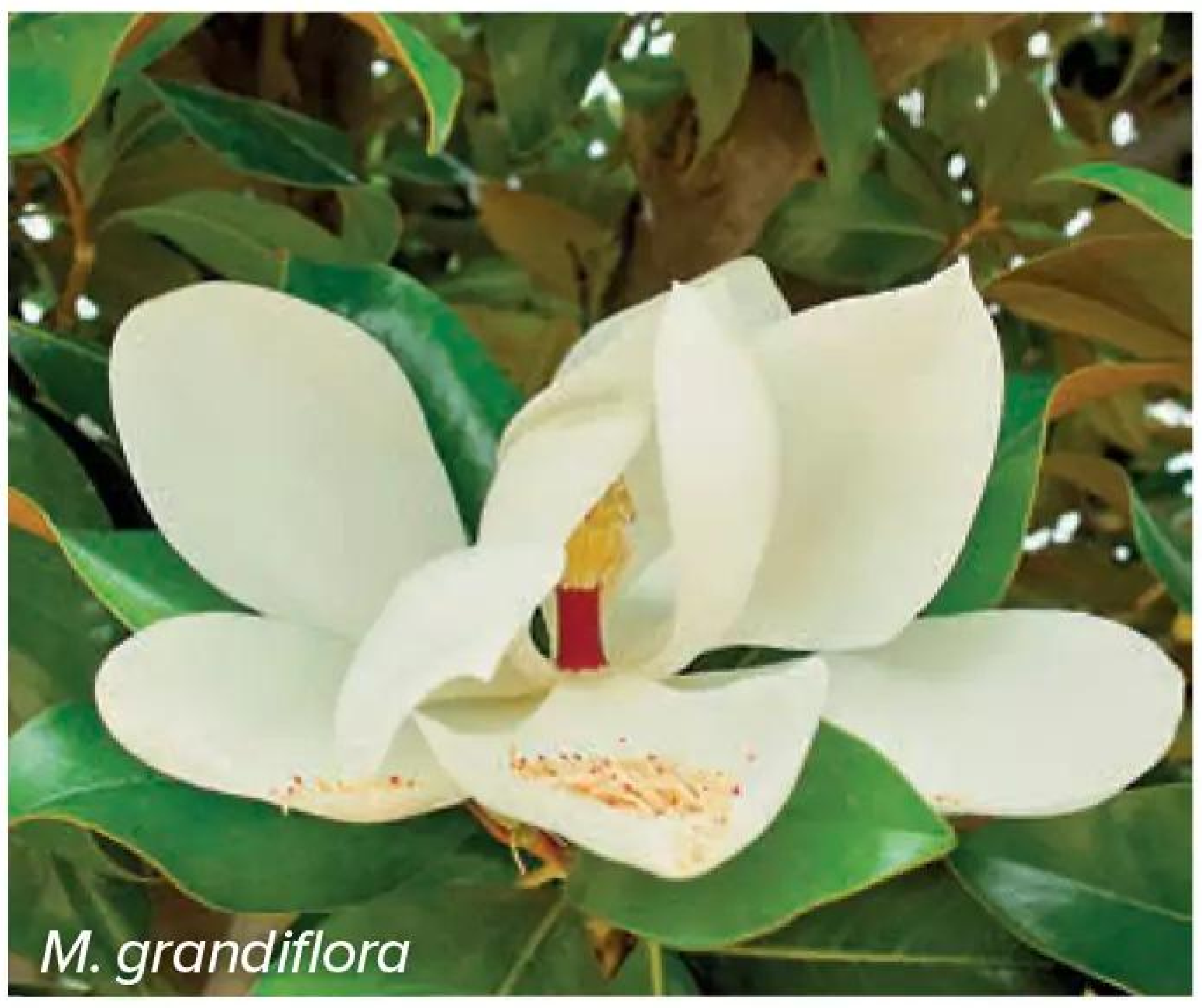
Magnolia 'Daphne'



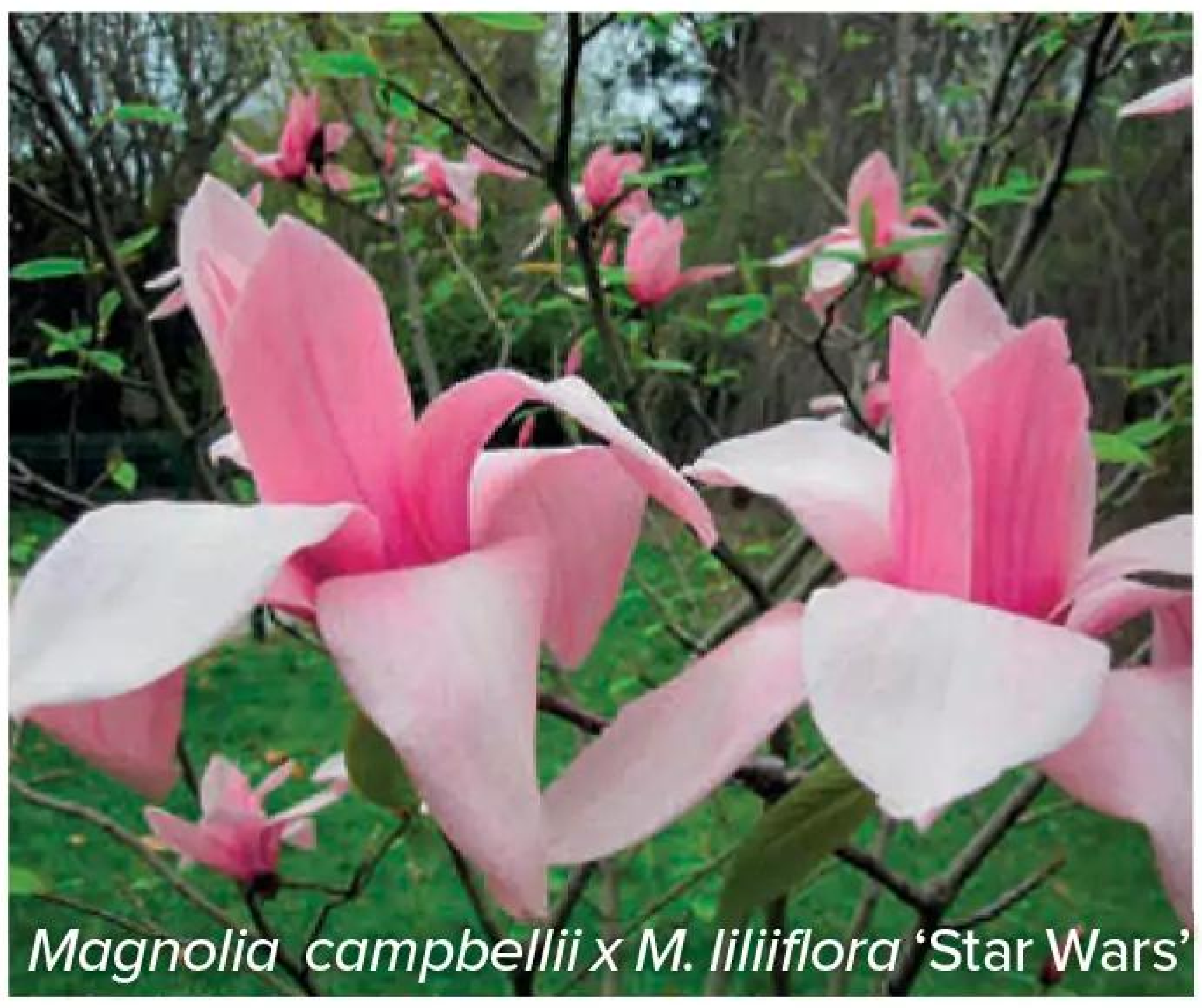
Magnolia × loebneri 'Leonard Messel'



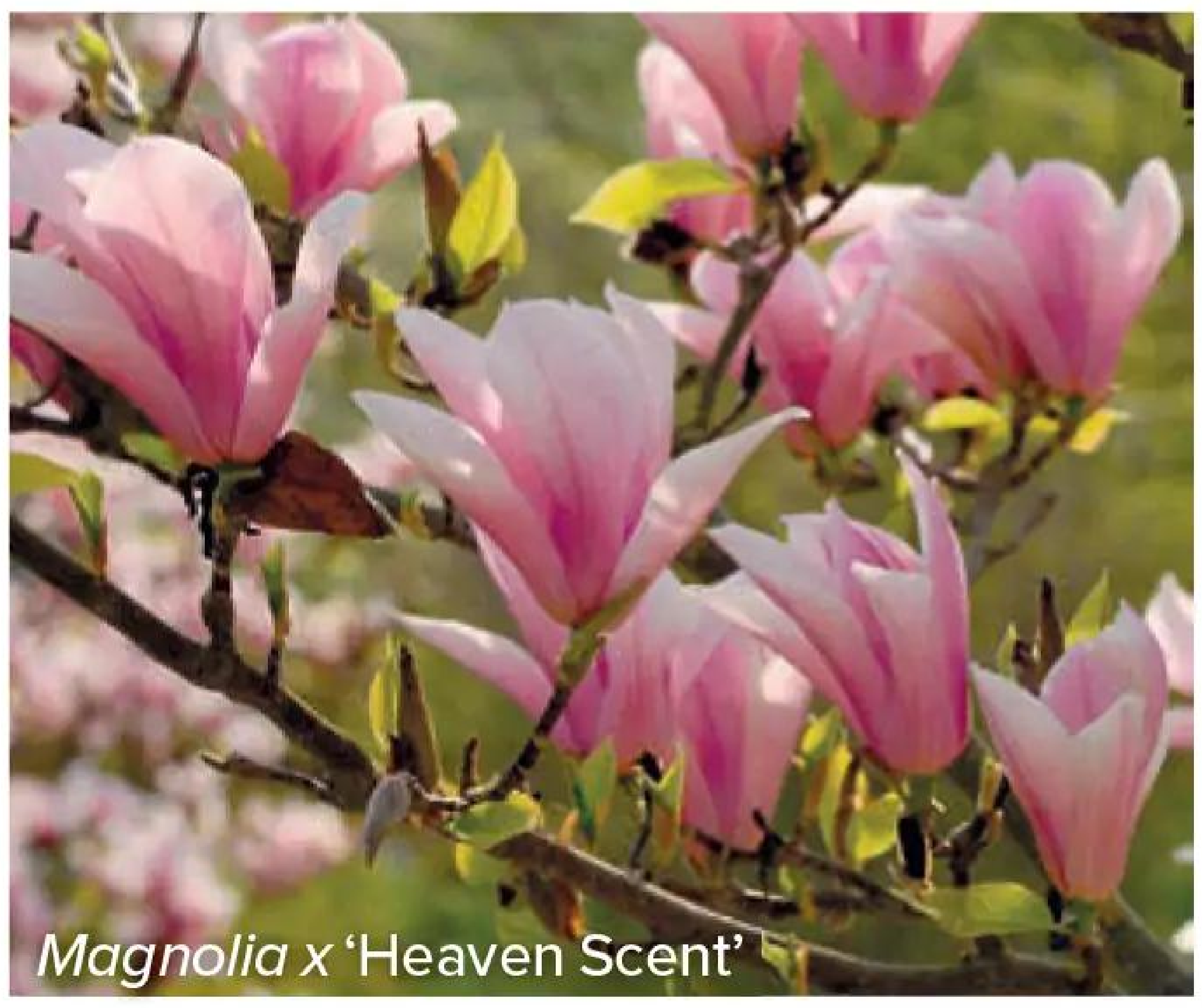
Magnolia × brooklynensis 'Elizabeth'



M. grandiflora



Magnolia campbellii x M. liliiflora 'Star Wars'



Magnolia x 'Heaven Scent'

GROWING ADVICE

- **Soil:** Good, fertile soils are preferred. Most prefer slightly acid conditions, but check before you buy.
- **Position:** Sun or light shade; choose a spot where they are not subjected to cold winds.
- **Planting:** Best done in spring.
- **Pruning:** Unwanted branches should be removed after flowering. Magnolias require only minimal pruning. Deciduous magnolias should only be pruned between midsummer and early autumn.
- **Problems:** Frost can damage buds, causing them to turn brown, and buds can sometimes be attacked by grey mould fungal disease. Yellow leaves may result if the soil is too alkaline. Hard pruning can inhibit flowering.

Diseases

Magnolias can be affected by bracket fungi, honey fungus and Phytophthora root rot.

Top tips

- Many prefer a neutral to slightly acidic soil
- Propagate from seed (2-4 month cold period needed), by layering, or cuttings – deciduous; softwood cuttings in spring: evergreen; semi-ripe cuttings in late summer/early autumn

Clematis

Plant: spring-late summer

Position: full sun

Hardiness: -10°C to -20 °C

Propagate: spring

Versatile climbers for all gardens

If you're looking for a climber for a small garden, a clematis is ideal. Although there is no shortage of climbing plants to choose from, no matter how tiny the space, or how packed with plants, you're unlikely to struggle to fit in a clematis.

One of the reasons clematis are so popular is the sheer variety of flowers they offer. From tiny drooping, bell-like blooms to large, dramatic summer saucers – the range of sizes, shapes and colours available is huge.

Most clematis are self-clinging and will scramble up fences and trellises, through shrubs and up trees, creating striking planting combinations or bringing privacy to overlooked gardens. And you don't have to wait long to enjoy the benefits: plant a late-flowering clematis in the spring and your boundary will be covered in blooms that summer.

The best known are the summer-flowerers, but there are some beautiful varieties that will bring your garden to life in winter. *C. cirrhosa* cultivars flower from December to February – 'Wisley Cream' has beautiful cream, bell-shaped flowers that light up a grey day; or there's 'Freckles', which has red and brown speckles. In spring, look for *C. armandii* and *C. alpina* cultivars; then, as you go into summer, the viticella varieties will transform

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS ALAMY UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

Top tips

- Certain clematis are very vigorous, reaching 33ft (10m) or more so always check height guidelines!
- Varieties from the 'Amazing Series' have been specially bred with long, straight stems for cutting and have an impressive vase life

Don't forget...

Keep an eye out for **clematis wilt**. Affected plants will have black and wilting stems and leaves, and should be pruned right back to healthy foliage

fences and walls with their large, vibrant blooms.

In fact, with a bit of planning and careful selection, it's possible to have a clematis in flower just about every month of the year. Look for three that span different seasons, and you'll have a long period of colour without sacrificing too much border space. There are also clematis suitable for a range of garden situations, from sunny walls to shady fences, for growing through other climbers and shrubs, even for containers.

PLANTING

Clematis enjoy full sun. Whether this is on a bright fence or emerging at the top of a large shrub or small tree, head in the sun with feet in the shade is a pretty good maxim.

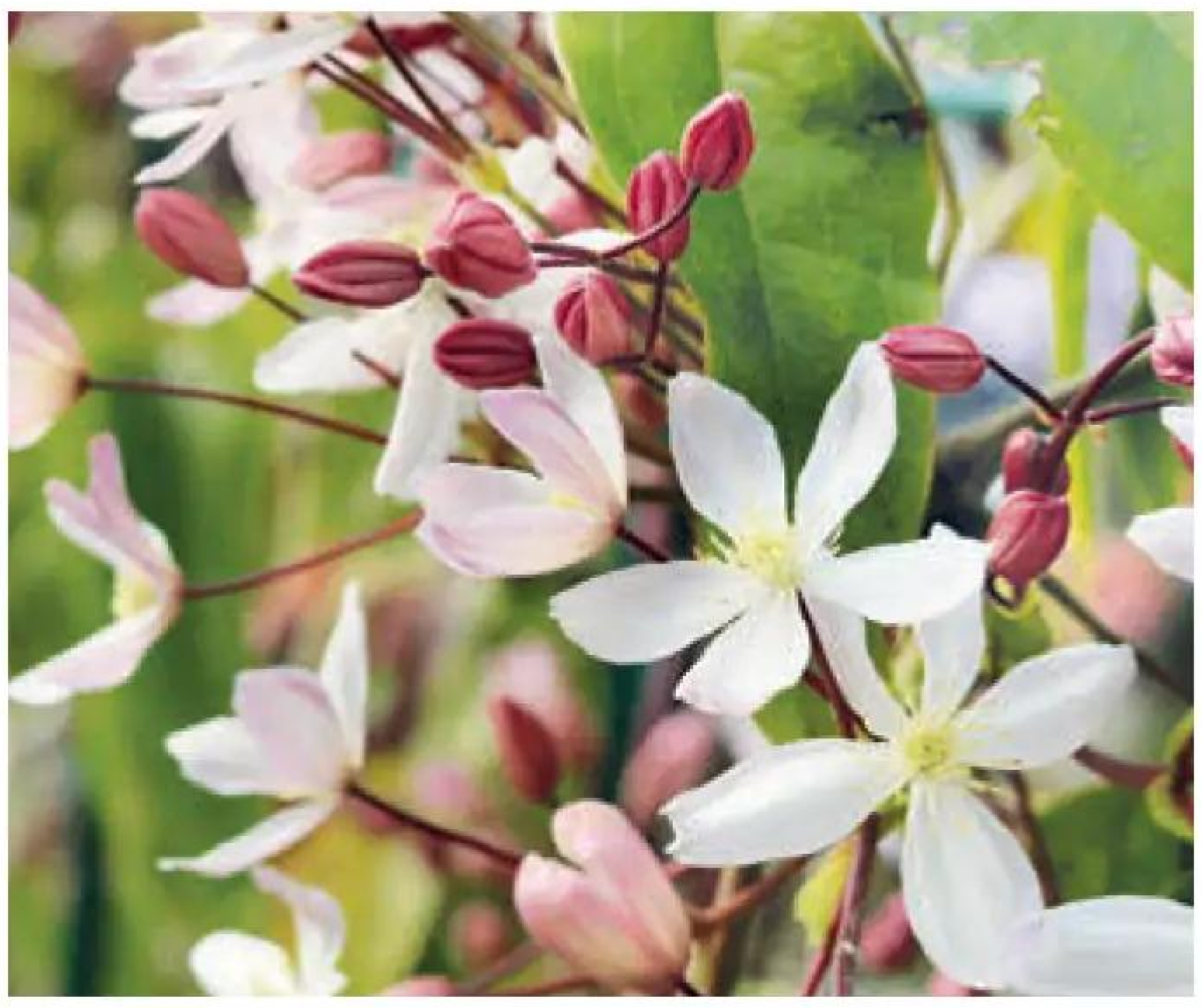
Although planting in late summer is often ideal, it risks damaging fragile new growth in the process. So many are bought and planted in spring, but will need more attention to watering, ensuring that the roots do not dry out in their first summer.

Spring clematis grow strongly, most developing a large root system, so they appreciate thorough preparation. Dig a hole 12-18in (30-45cm) across and deep, retaining the top layer of dark, fertile soil and discarding any subsoil. Add compost, plus a general fertiliser, and mix it into the base of the hole. You want plenty of rich soil into which the new roots can grow. Plant with the surface of the compost 2-3in (5-7.5cm) below the surrounding soil level, then fill with improved soil. Finally, firm well with the toe of your boot and then water-in generously with liquid fertiliser.

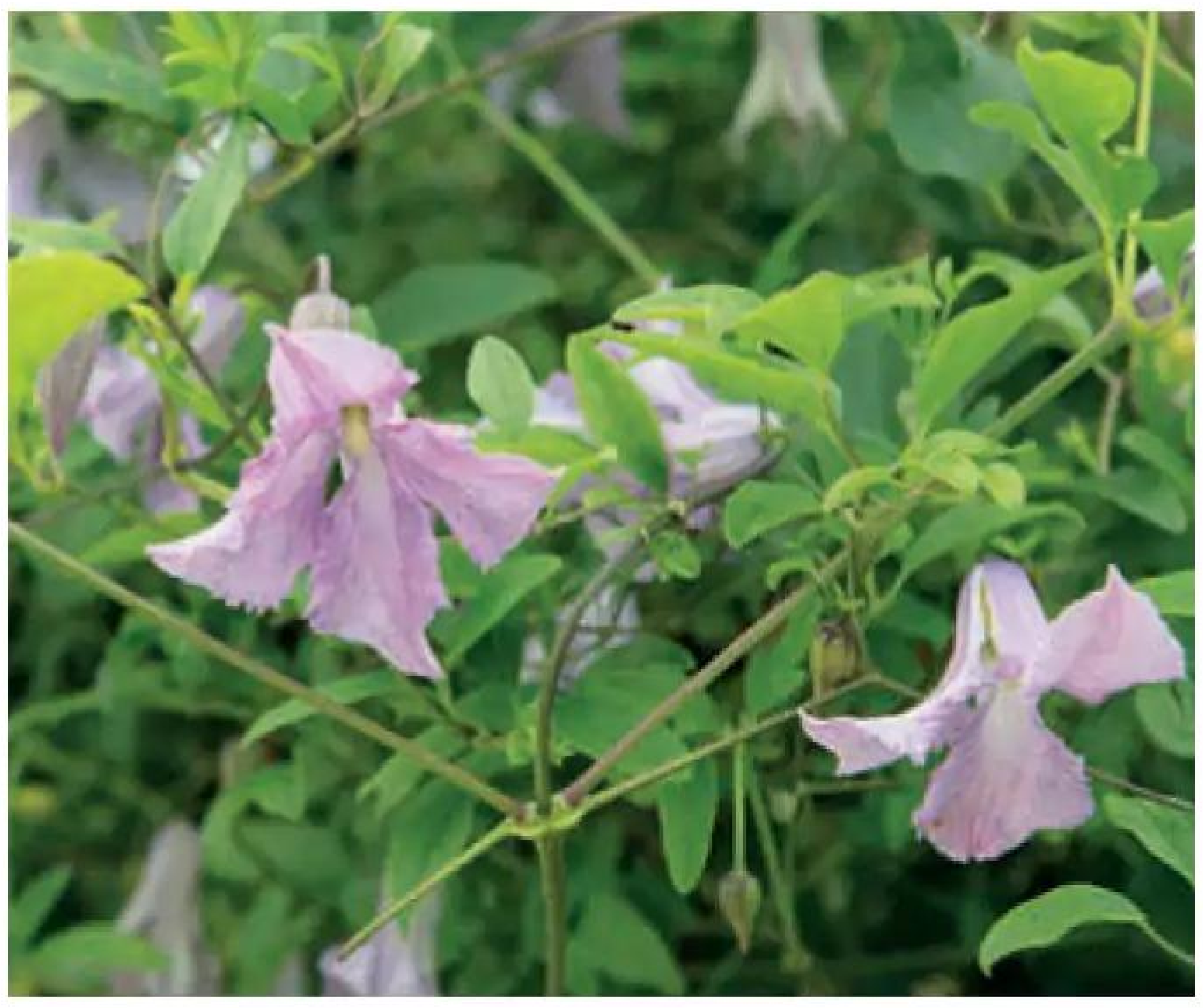
Did you know...

The more vigorous *C. armandii* and *C. montana* can be encouraged into mature trees or large shrubs, to cling to stout wires fixed on robust fences, or directed over garden buildings

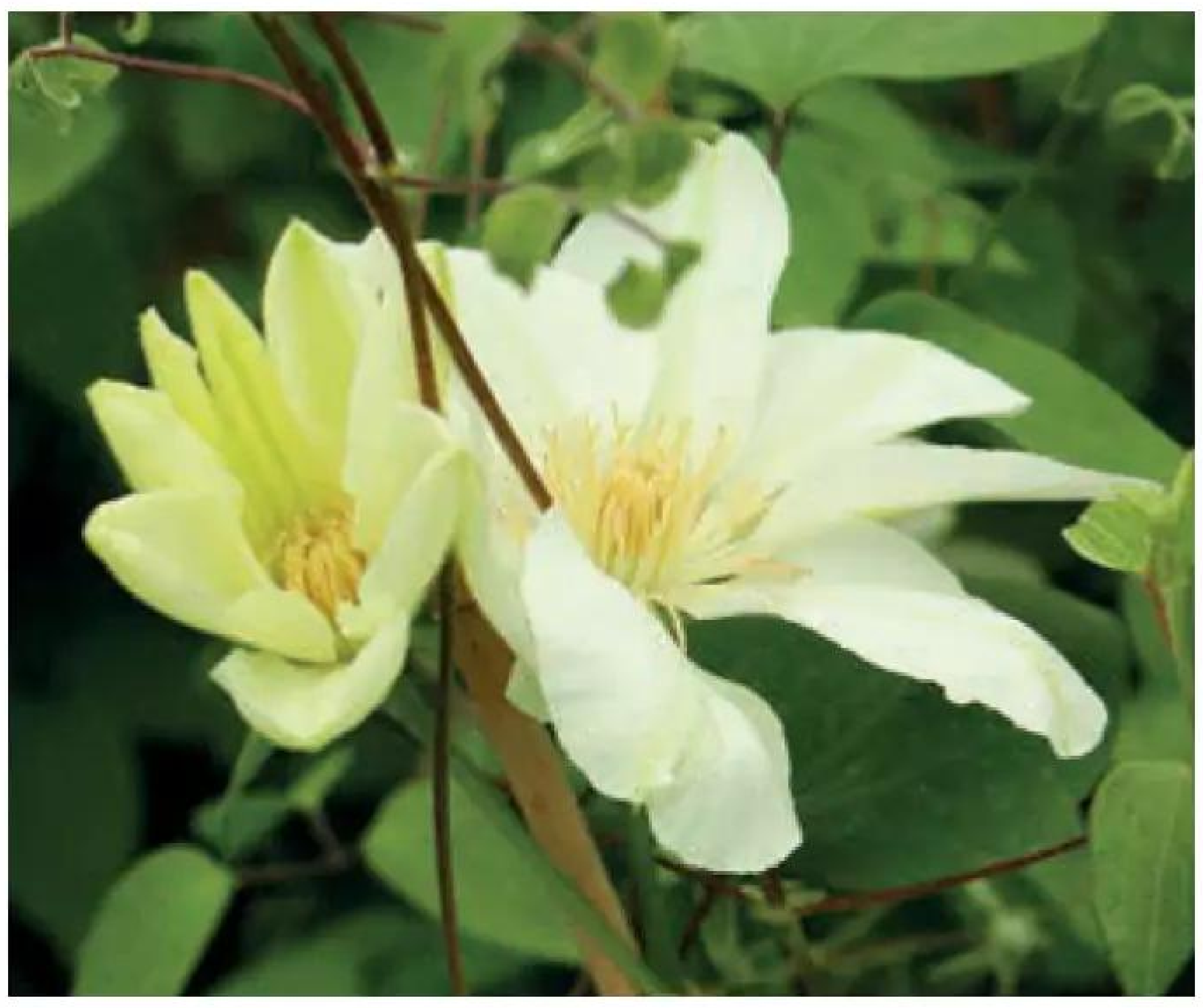
THREE FRAGRANT OPTIONS



C. armandii **'Apple Blossom'**
An aptly named rambling evergreen variety in a pinky white – it really does have the scent of apple blossom (or, some say, almonds). Unusual, but well worth seeking out. **Flowers**: Mar-Apr. **HxS:** 20x5ft (6x1½m).



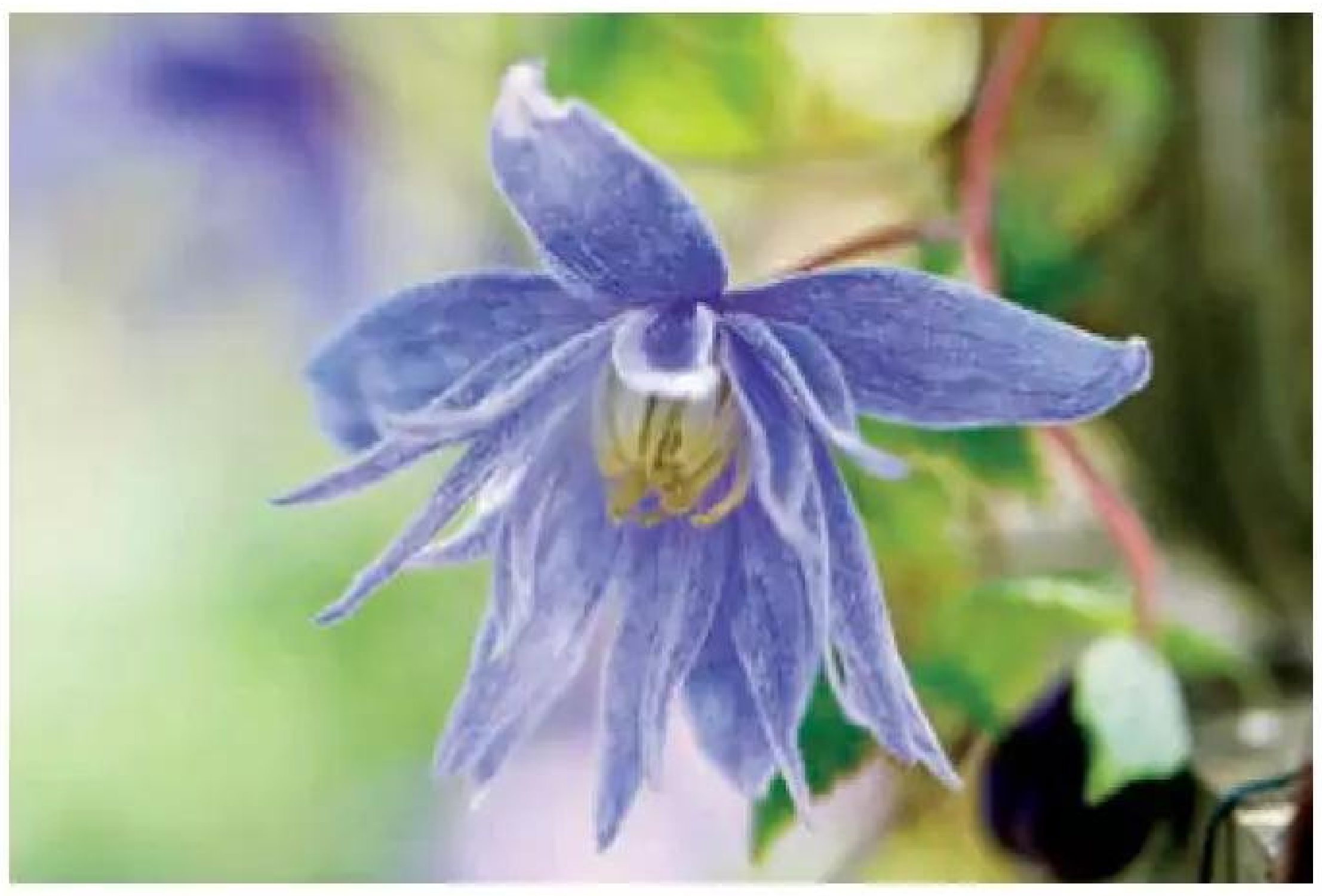
C. montana **'Betty Corning'**
A delightful variety with nodding, bell-shaped flowers in soft lilac. Its blooms offer a sweet fragrance often described as vanilla-like. Ideal for smaller gardens or container growing. **Flowers:** Jun-Sep. **HxS:** 8x3ft (2.5x1m).



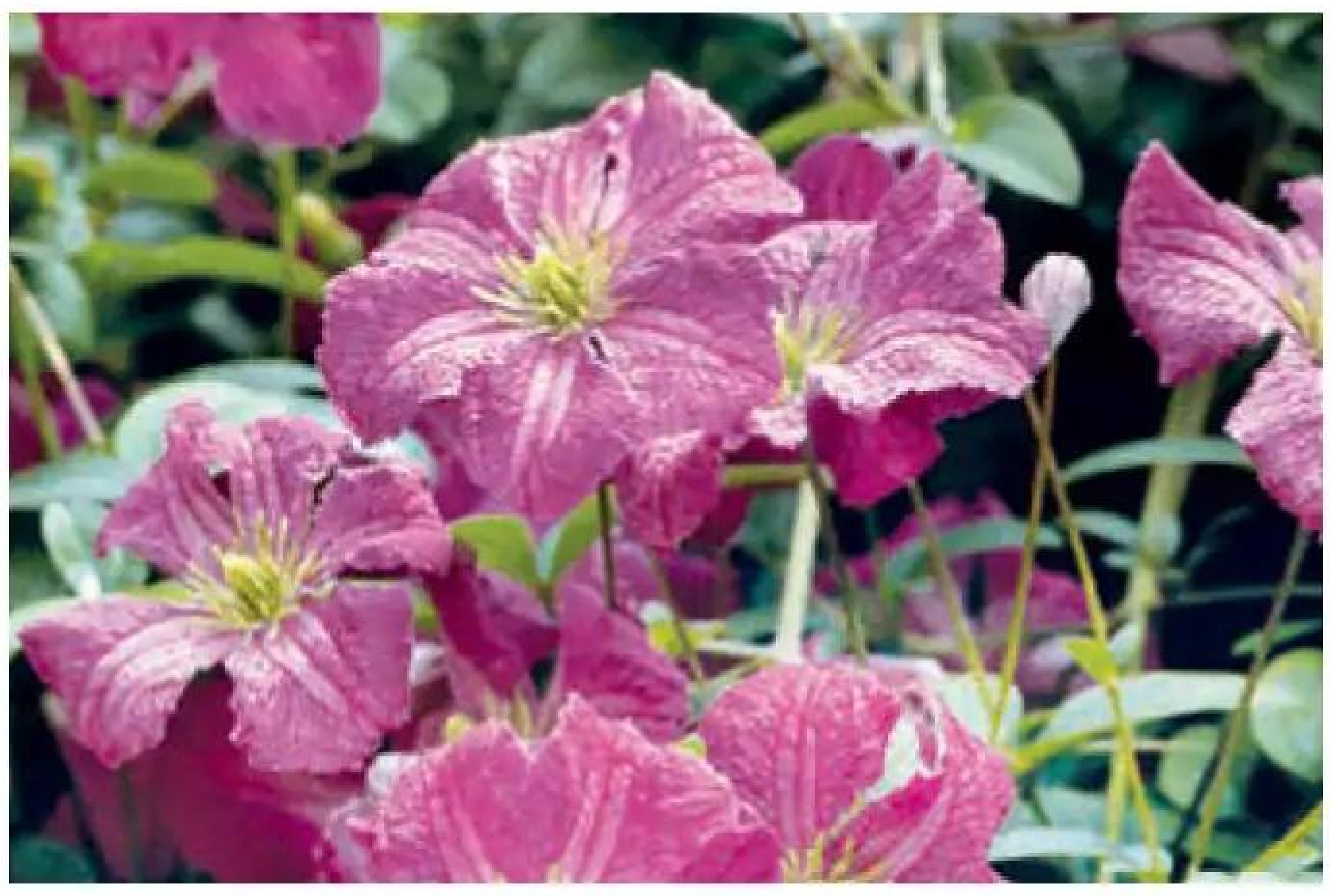
C. 'Guernsey Cream'
An elegant clematis featuring large, creamy-white flowers with golden anthers. It produces a subtle, sweet scent that complements its visual appeal. Stunning against dark backgrounds. **Flowers:** May-Jun, Aug-Sep. **HxS:** 8x4ft (2.5x1.2m).

Take 3 clematis... and enjoy flowers month after month

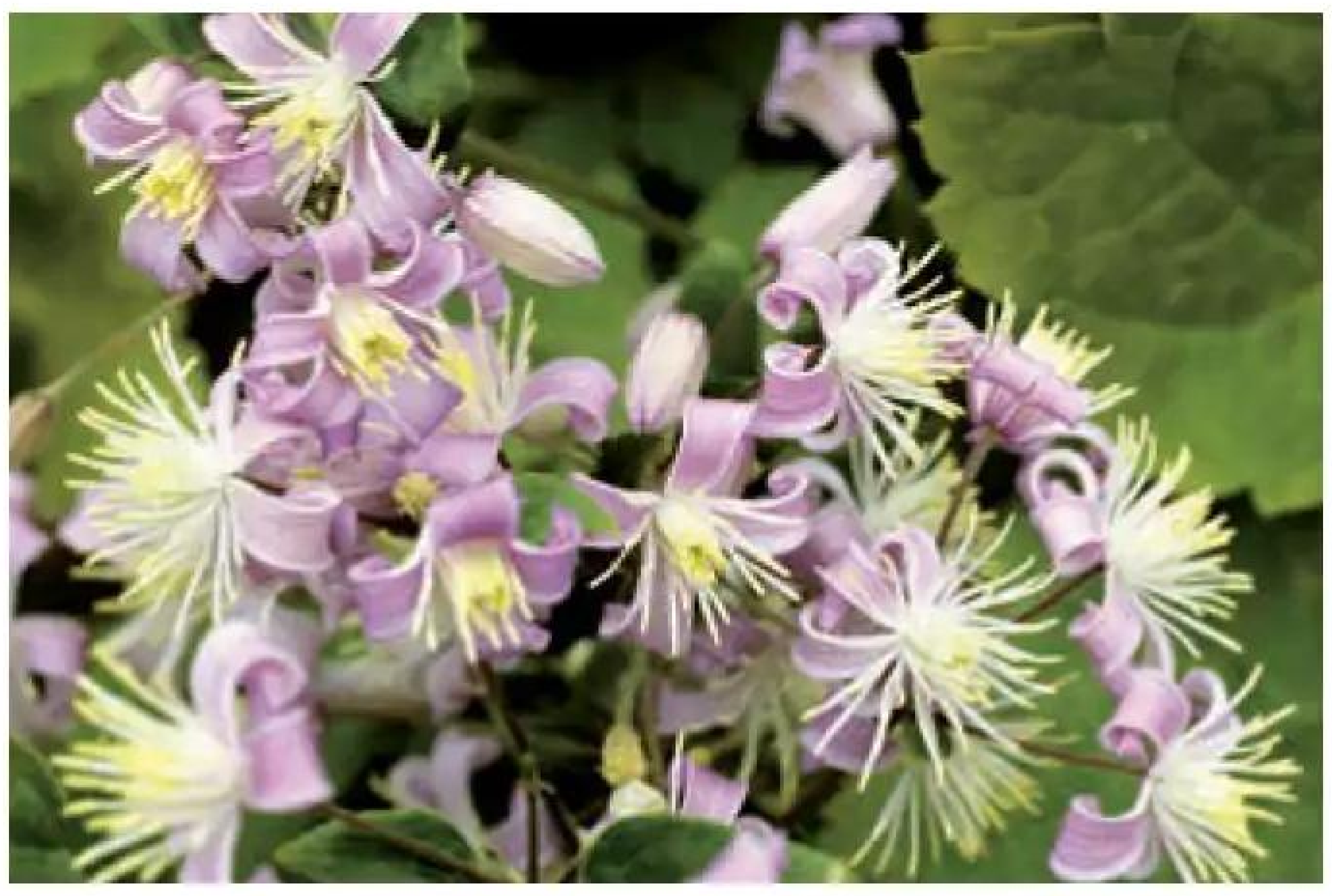
Combination 1



SPRING *C. macropetala* 'Lagoon' This tough clematis will flourish in partial shade, making it a good choice for tricky north-facing walls. **Flowers:** April-May. **HxS:** 10x5ft (3x 1 ½m).

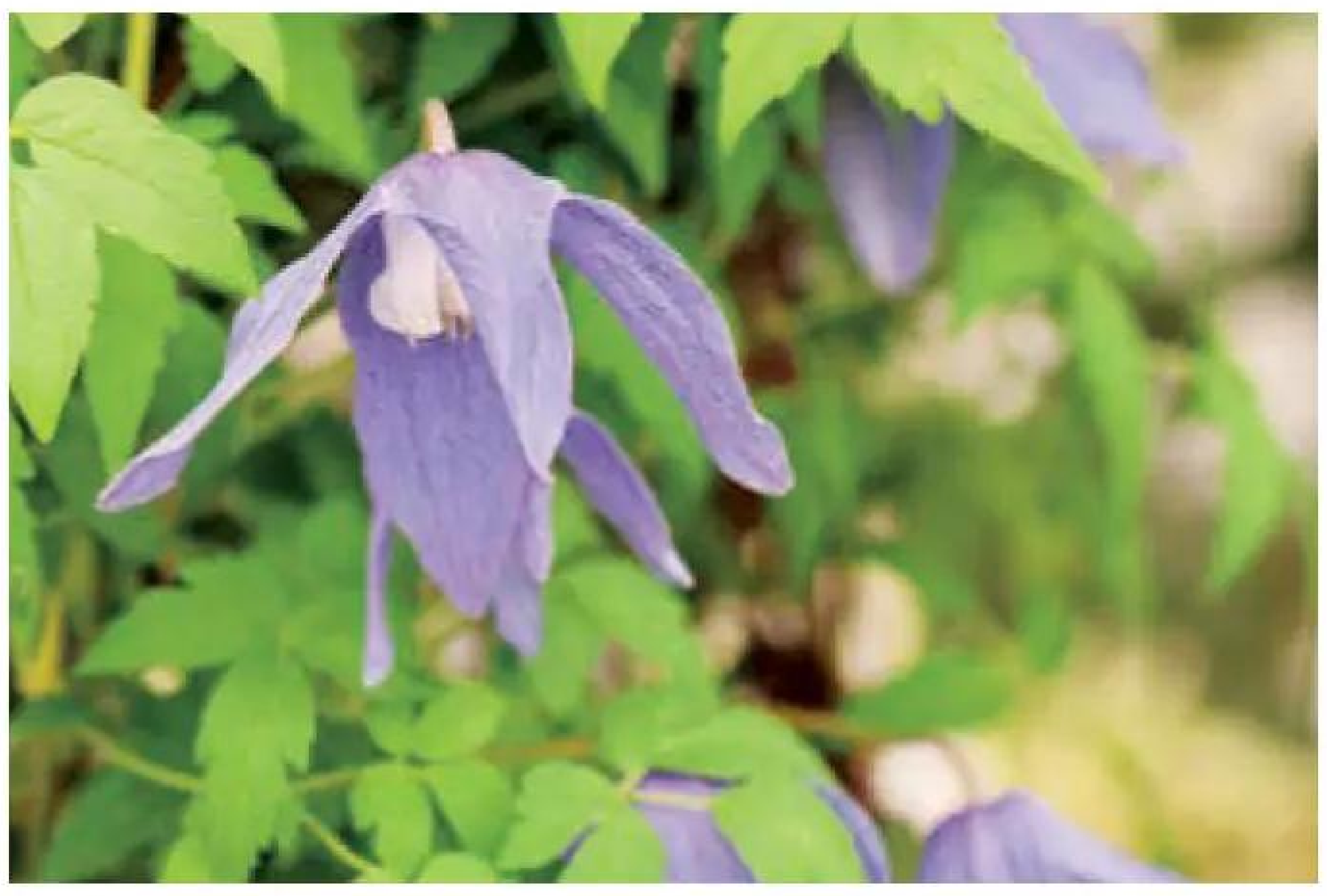


SUMMER *C. viticella* 'Abundance' This late summer-flowering viticella variety has masses of wine-red flowers that are small but vibrant. **Flowers:** July-September. **HxS**: 10ftx39in (3x1m).

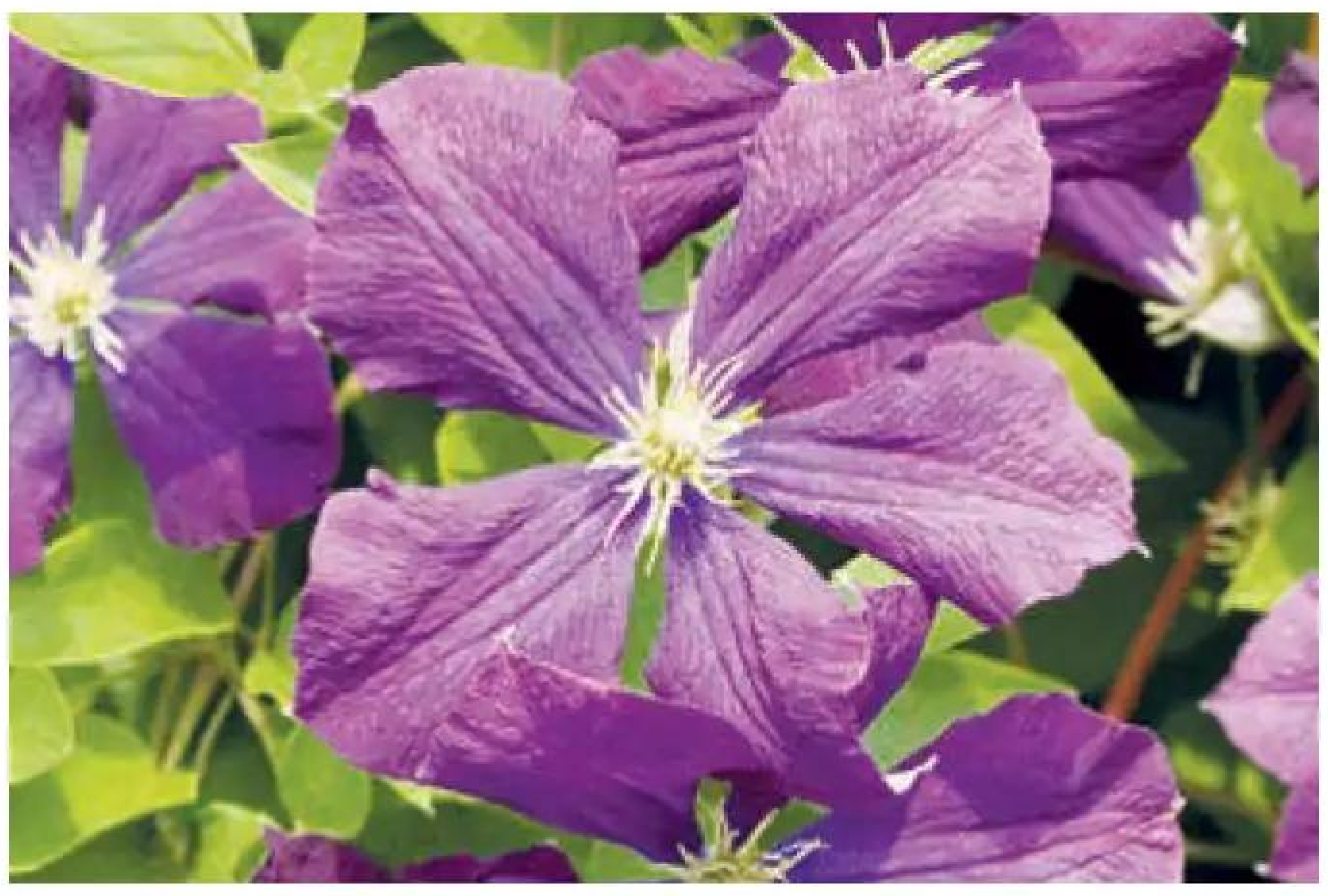


AUTUMN C. 'Praecox' The shorter flowering time is worth it for its masses of flowers covering the plant in autumn. **Flowers:** September-October. **HxS**: 8ftx39in (2½x1m).

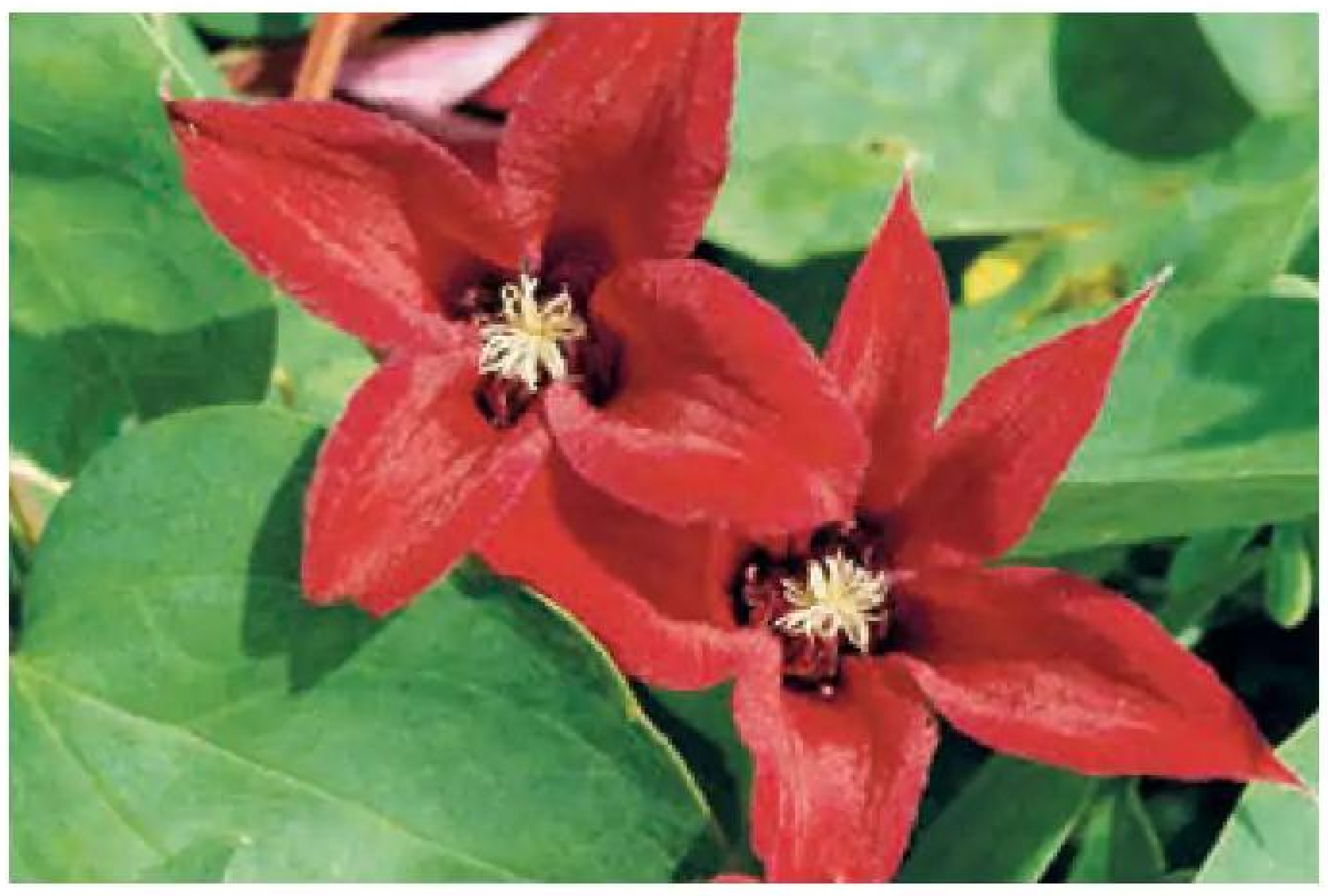
Combination 2



SPRING C. 'Frances Rivis' A tough, foolproof clematis, 'Frances Rivis' is a reliable bloomer, it doesn't need pruning. **Flowers:** Apr-May. **HxS:** 10x5ft (3x1½m).

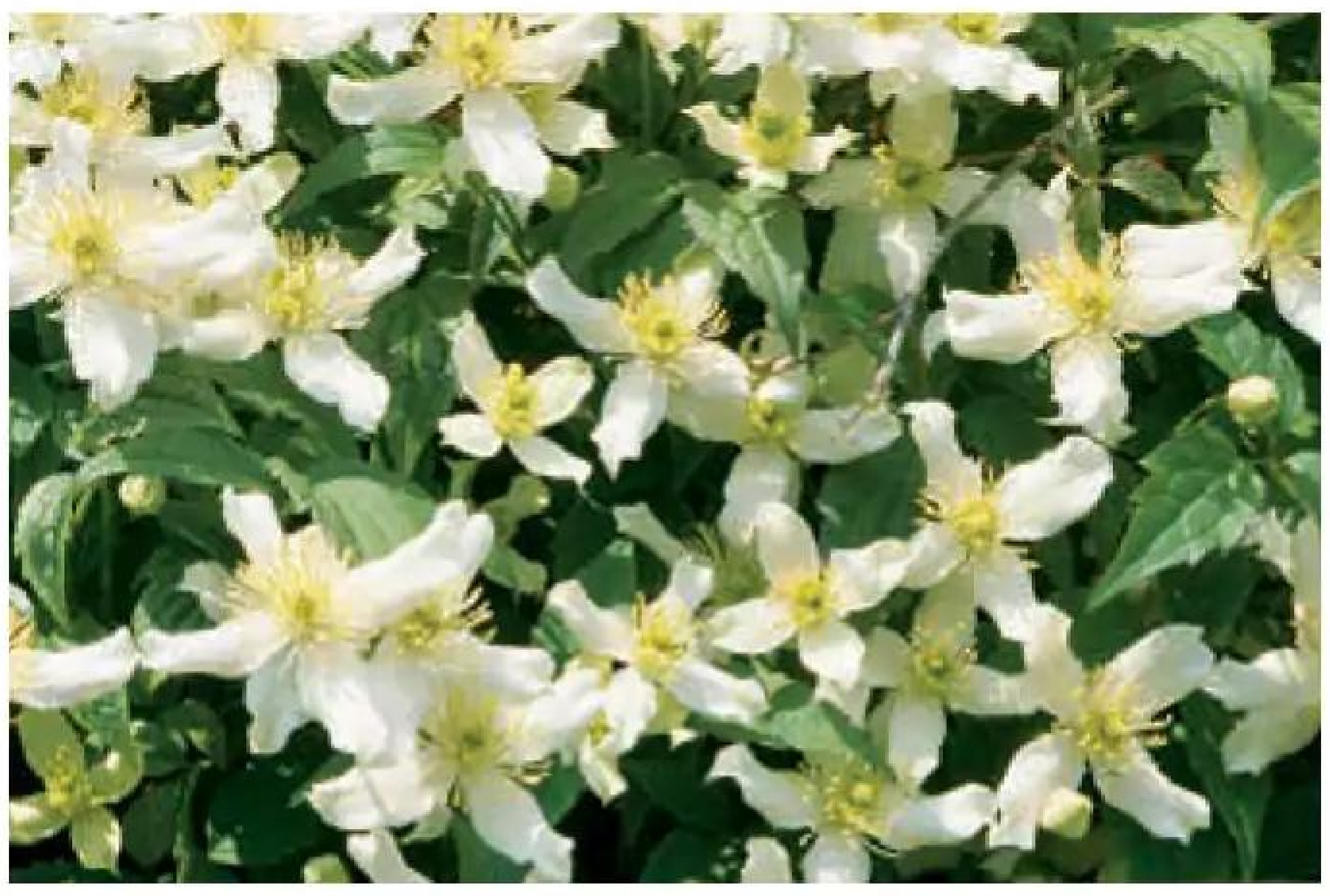


SUMMER C. 'Étoile Violette' Great for a sunny fence; or plant through shrubs and trees, where it can climb upwards. **Flowers:** Jul-Sep. **HxS:** 16½x5ft (5x1½m).

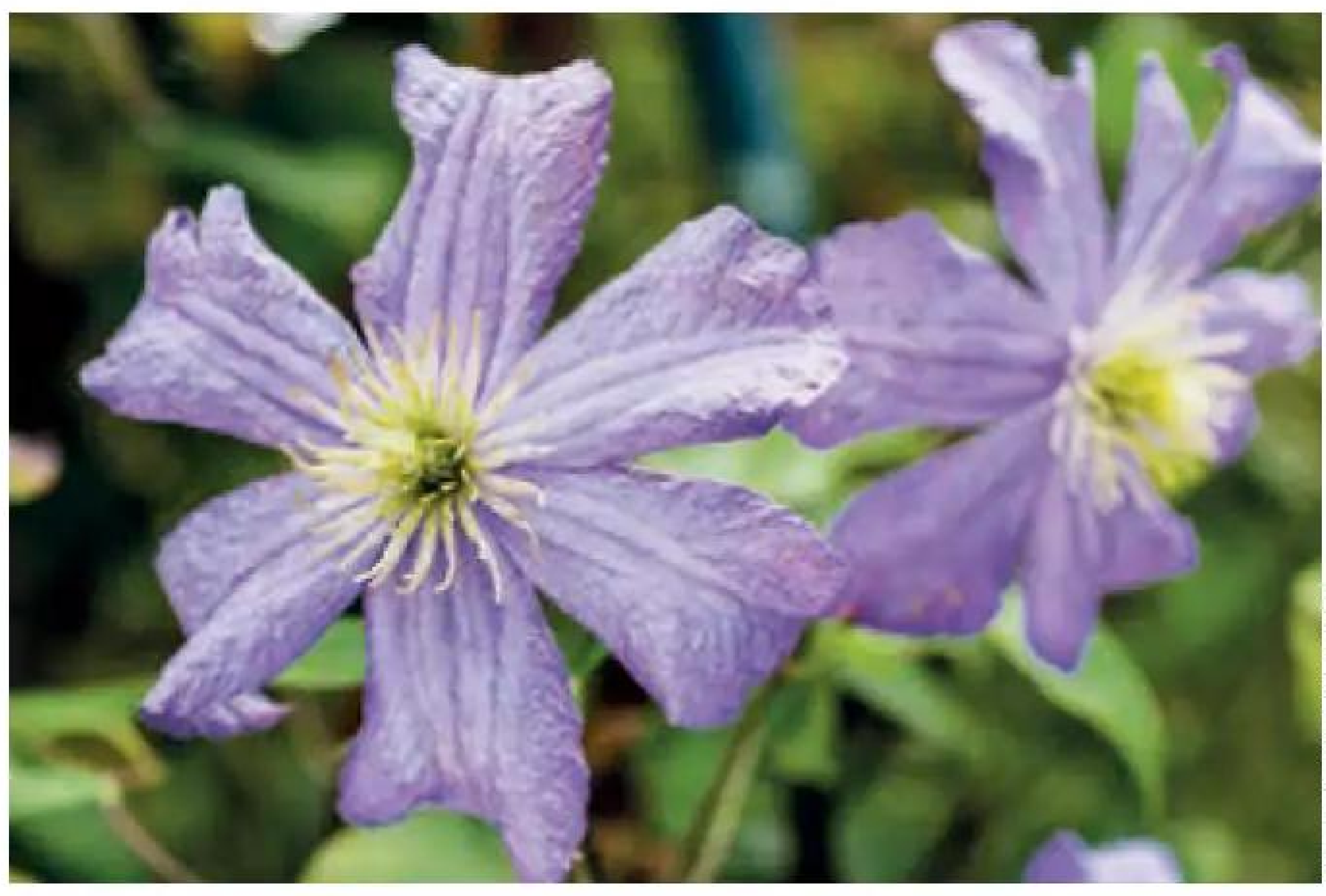


AUTUMN *C. texensis* 'Gravetye Beauty' Deep-red flowers appear from late summer into autumn. Good for containers or borders. **Flowers:** Jul-Oct. **HxS:** 10ftx39in (3x1m).

Combination 3

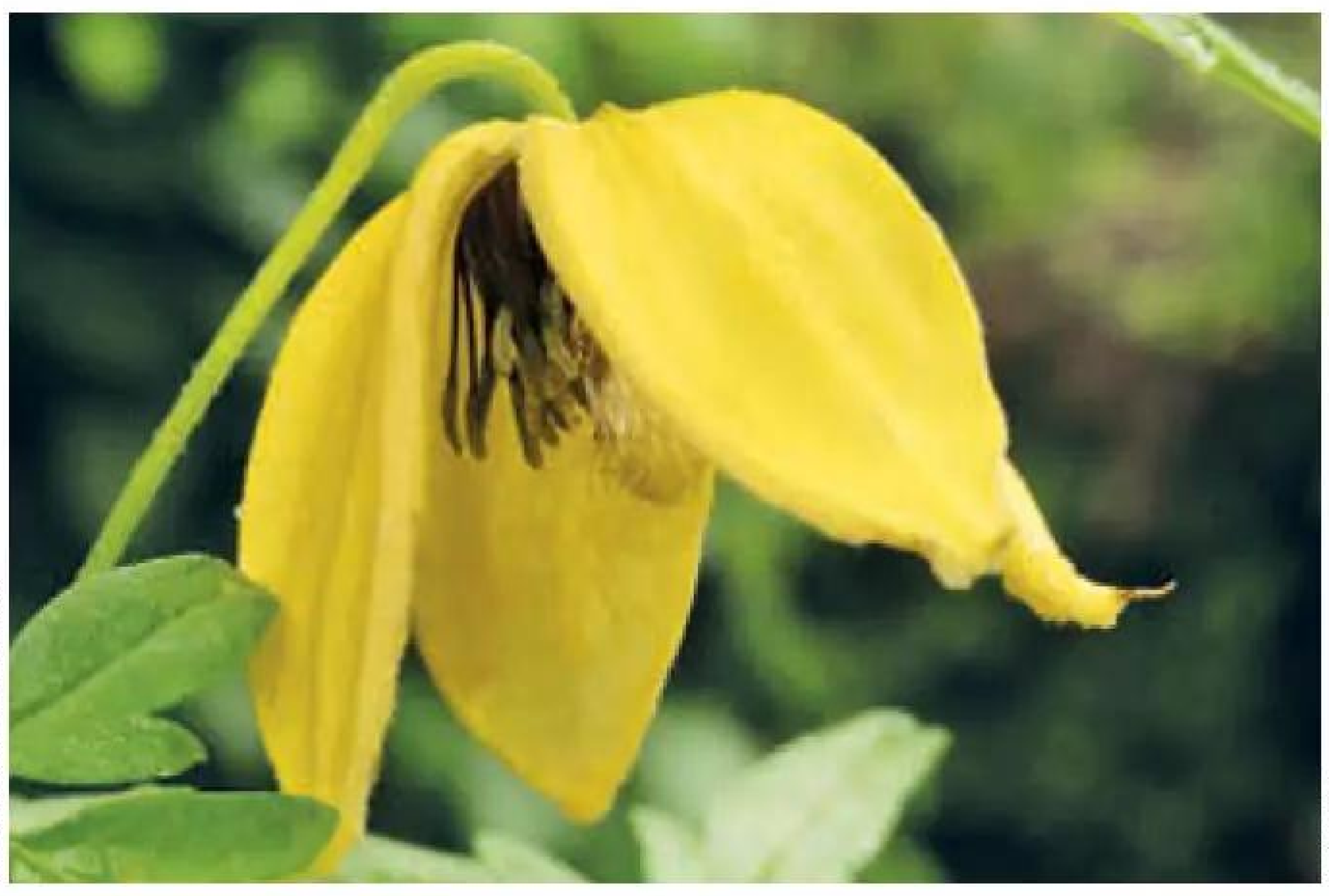


SPRING *C. montana var. wilsonii* Masses of scented, star-shaped white flowers will fill trees and arches from late spring to early summer. **Flowers:** May-Jun.**HxS:** 20ftx39in (6x1m).



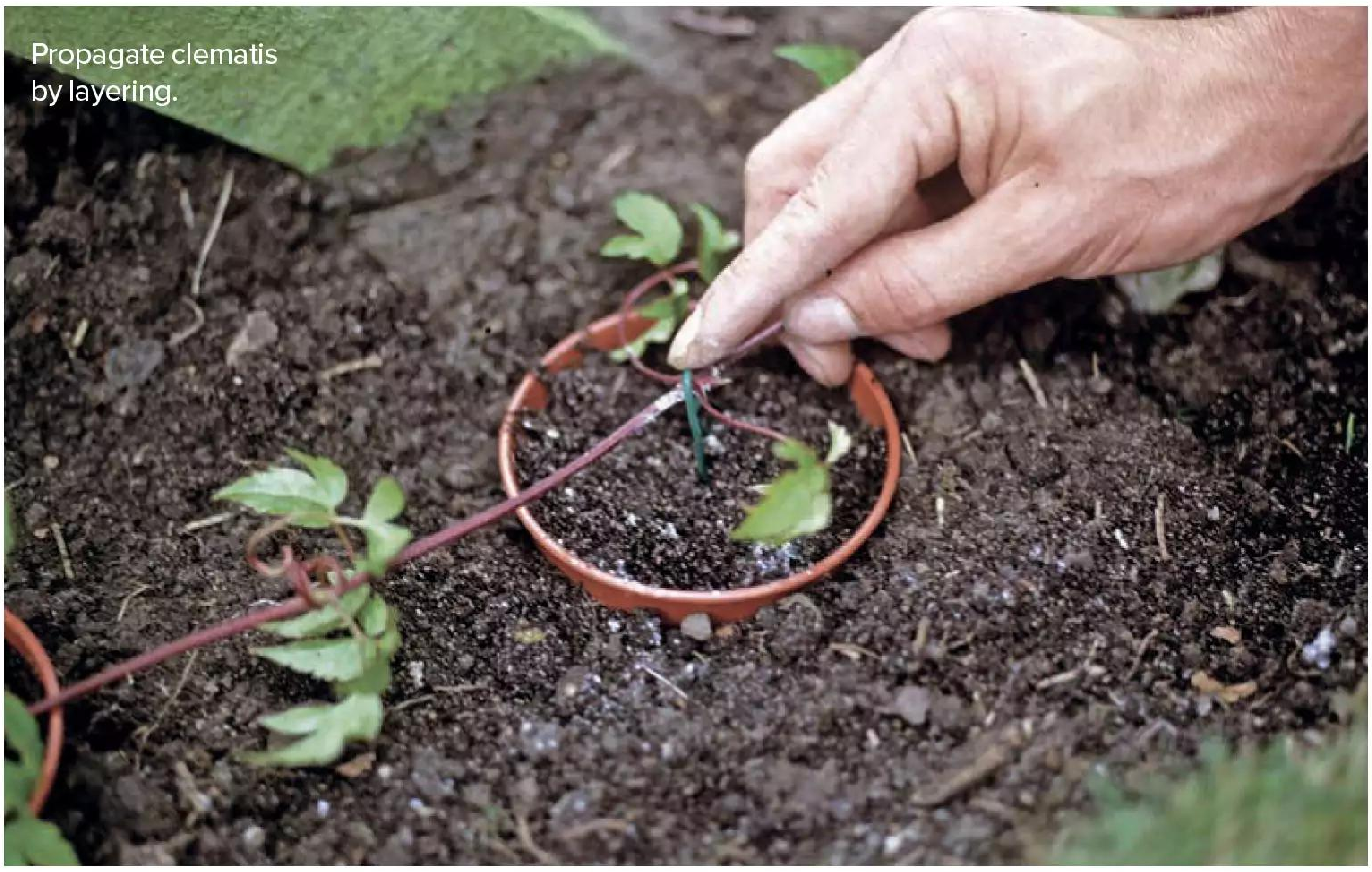
SHUTTERSTOCK

SUMMER *C. viticella* 'Prince Charles' AGM Large-flowered and reliable, with pale-blue/purple blooms. Perfect for small spaces or containers. **Flowers:** Jul-Sep. **HxS:** 8ftx39in (2½x1m).



GETTY

AUTUMN C. 'Bill MacKenzie' Bright-yellow blooms appear from midsummer to autumn, followed by fluffy seedheads. Sun or partial shade. **Flowers:** Jul-Oct. **HxS:** 13ftx39in (4x1m).



Propagate clematis by layering.

PROPAGATION

The simplest and most reliable approach is layering. This is not the most productive method, but is easy and requires no special equipment.

In early spring, select a shoot low on the plant. Choose a stem that grew the previous year – these can be identified by their pale-brown, rather than dark-brown, colouring and may well have buds at the leaf joints.

Bend the stem down to the ground so that a leaf joint is resting on the soil. At that point, bury a 5in-6in (12-15cm) flower pot, fill it with fresh potting soil, and firm well. Snip off any leaves or flowers at the chosen leaf joint, rest it on the soil in the pot and secure it in place with a piece of bent wire. Water well, then finish off by placing a stone or a half brick on top.

Water whenever the soil in the pots looks as if it might dry out. By autumn, roots should have developed and new growth should be seen and this is the time to snip the stem attaching the new plant to the original. Dig up the pot, with its new plant, remove the plant from its pot and plant in another site.

PRUNING

Pruning clematis sounds complicated but it's actually simple. Group 1 (early flowering) need no major pruning, just a quick tidy up after flowering. Group 2 (early summer-flowering varieties) should be pruned in February to remove weak growth, cutting back to a pair of strong buds. And Group 3 (late summer-flowering) need hard pruning, also in February, back to a pair of buds about 1ft (30cm) from the ground.

3 perfect picks for pots

ALAMY

C. 'Nelly Moser' A striking, large-flowered variety that's excellent for containers and small spaces. The blooms are spectacular – pale pink with a distinctive carmine-red bar down the center of each sepal.

SHUTTERSTOCK

C. 'Fujimusume' Large flowers come in a true-blue and have attractive contrasting yellow stamens. Once flowering is over, you can look forward to striking golden autumn seedheads.

SHUTTERSTOCK

C. 'Piilu' Generous, vibrant-pink flowers give an instant boost to patios in late spring, then reappear in late summer. The first flush are double or semi-double, the second single, and a paler pink.

Top tip

Clematis respond well to rejuvenation, so if you find that the variety you have planted is too vigorous for its situation, and regular pruning does not restrain it sufficiently, then removing almost all the top growth will inspire new shoots from the base although one season's flowers will be missed

Lungwort

Pulmonaria

Plant: early spring/ early autumn

Position: full/partial shade

Hardiness: -20C

Propagate: division in autumn

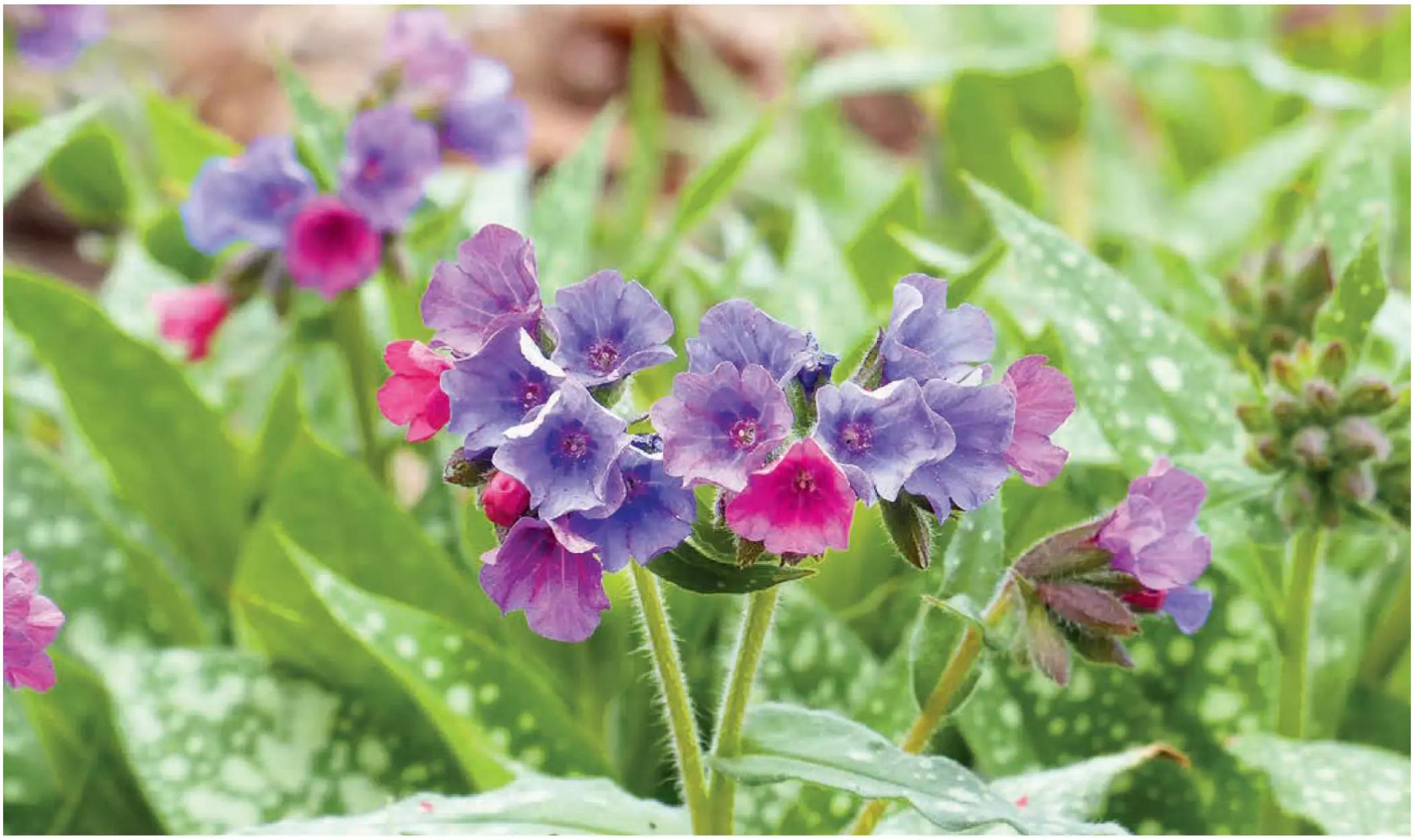
A versatile perennial that offers both beautiful flowers and striking foliage for shady spots

Steadily forming dense low cover, pulmonarias are easy-to-grow hardy perennials that bring us the best of two worlds. In spring come the flowers, which resemble giant forget-me-nots, and at the same time that the flower stems are stretching, the new leaves are developing, often enhanced by their silvery colouring.

Pulmonarias for flowers

In late winter or early spring, and sometimes through into early summer, the short flower stems of pulmonarias emerge, usually not reaching more than about 30cm (12in) high. The flower stems unfurl as the flowers open; the buds usually begin pink and develop a wide range of blue and purple shades, sometimes in pastel tones and sometimes in richer colours. Varieties with mature flowers in more intense red shades are becoming more widely available.

The flowers usually stand just above the foliage and provide valuable early nectar for bees.



Top tips

- Cut off old leaves before flower buds emerge in winter for a better spring display
- Deadhead after flowering to prevent the appearance of inferior seedlings
- Use as ground cover to suppress weeds

Pulmonarias for foliage

Pulmonaria leaves vary from lance-shaped to heart-shaped and are rough in texture. They are mainly dark green, but usually feature silver spots, either in the form of a scattering of spots, densely spotted or sometimes almost completely silver.

These plants make a dense, overlapping cover and effectively suppress weeds. Although the clumps may become thinner in winter as older leaves die off, they usually maintain at least a partial covering.

Diseases

The foliage may be damaged by slugs or snails. Use an organic treatment, such as nematodes, or physcial barriers of crushed eggshell, grit or seaweed mulch, and beer traps; place beer traps away from your plants, as they actually *attract* slugs.

In dry conditions, powdery mildews. may develop. Avoid overhead watering and remove infected fallen leaves in autumn.

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Position:** Grow in light or partial shade. Most pulmonarias are unhappy in full sun, although more sun is tolerated in moisture-retentive soil.

✿ **Soil:** Avoid thin, dry soil that encourages weak growth and mildew infection.

✿ **Propagation:** Lift, divide and replant pulmonarias every five or six years – most do not need more frequent division.

✿ **Care:** In winter, cut off all the old leaves before the flower buds emerge so the display is not ruined.

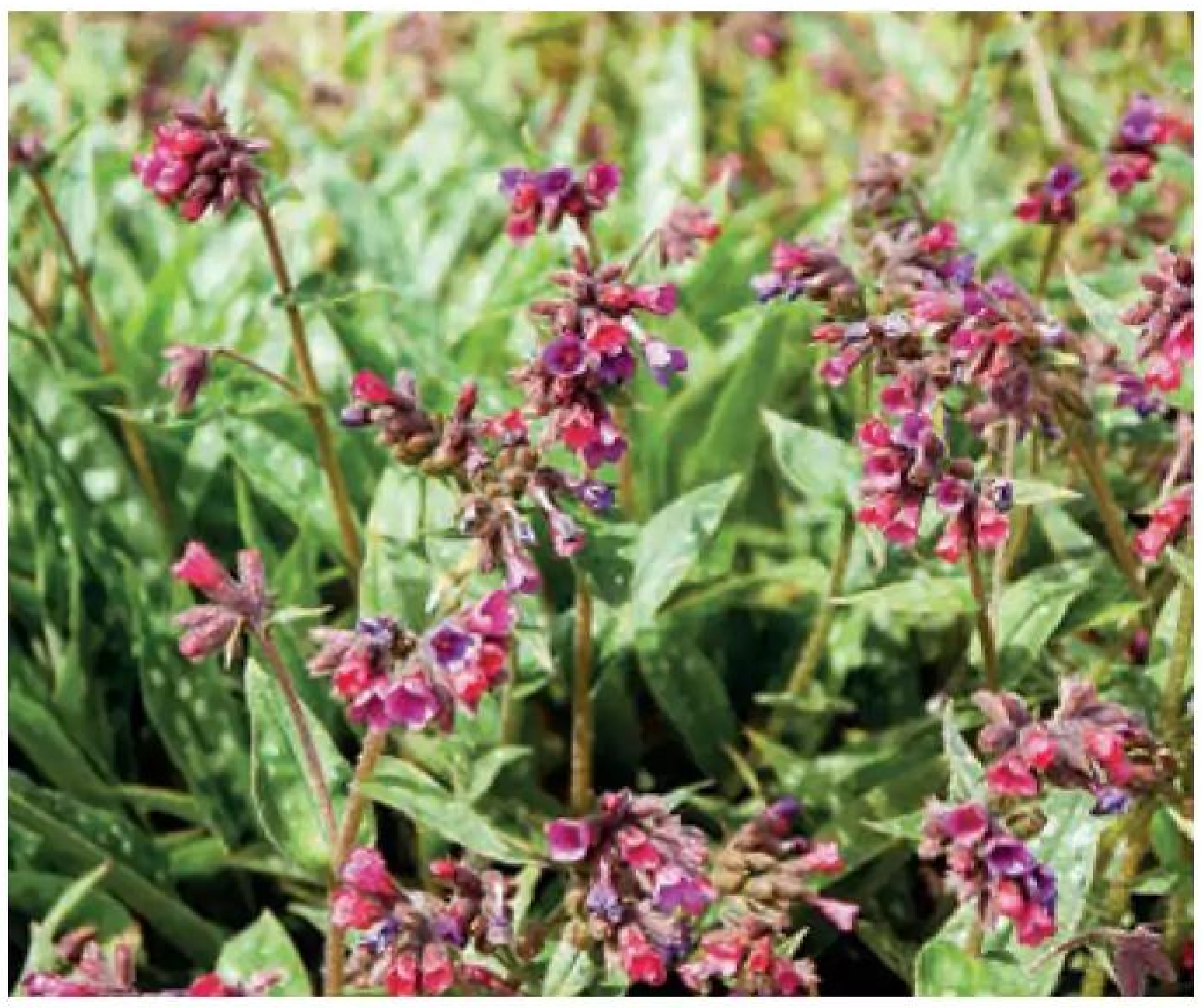
✿ **Deadheading:** Affter flowering prevents the appearance of inferior seedlings.

Wildlife value

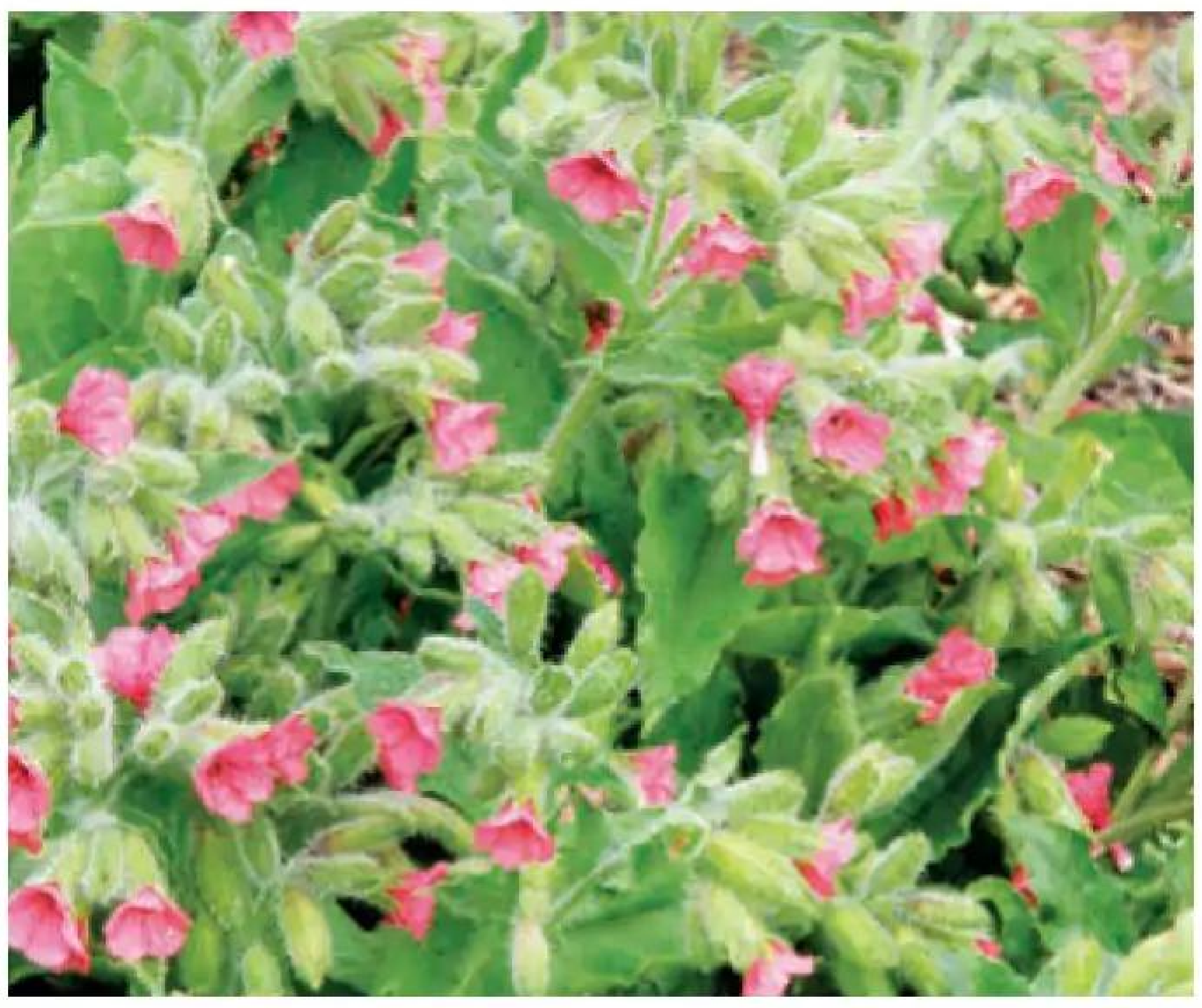
- Early flowers provide valuable nectar for bees
- Dense foliage offers shelter for small wildlife
- Leaves may be eaten by slugs and snails, supporting garden biodiversity

Ladybird larvae coming to the rescue. A single ladybird can eat up to 5,000 aphids in its lifetime!

PRETTY PINKS



P. 'Raspberry Splash'
Vigorous plants produce prolific, raspberry-red flowers among well-spotted, rather upright foliage. Makes an especially bold presence. **Special feature:** Sun tolerance, vivid flower colour. **Good for:** Impact. **Grow with:** A ground-covering drift. **Height:** 30-35cm (12-14in).



***P. rubra* 'Redstart'**
Vigorous plants feature distinctive, pale-green, unpotted leaves and coral-red flowers opening before most other varieties. **Special feature:** Coral-red flowers, no blue colouring. **Good for:** A site that never dries out. **Grow with:** Ground cover under roses. **Height:** 30-45cm (12-18in).

P. 'Sissinghurst White' AGM
Evergreen, prettily spotted foliage makes an ideal background for the pure-white flowers with never a hint of pink. **Good for:** A fresh, clean, pure-white display. **Grow with:** White hellebores, white daffodils. **Height:** 25-30cm (10-12in).

BEAUTIFUL BLUES

SHUTTERSTOCK

P. 'Blue Ensign' AGM
Broad, very dark-green leaves are unspotted but show off the unusually large, rich-blue flowers that open from red buds. Dies back in winter. **Good for:** Flowering display, sun tolerance. **Grow with:** Yellow daffodils. **Height:** 25-30cm (10-12in).

SHUTTERSTOCK

P. 'Trevi Fountain' AGM
Long leaves are brightly spotted in silver, the large, prolific, dark-blue flowers open from velvety red buds. **Good for:** Flower and foliage combination. Ground cover. **Grow with:** Skimmias, golden conifers. **Height:** 25-30cm (10-12in).

P. 'Diana Clare' AGM
Long silvery-green leaves show off the unusual violet-blue flowers with five purple stripes in each flower. Usually keeps some leaves through winter. **Good for:** Flowers and remaining as a tight clump. **Grow with:** Purple-leaved berberis. **Height:** 20-30cm (8-12in).

OTHER COLOURS

P. 'Cotton Cool' AGM
Long, narrow leaves are almost completely silvered into autumn, sometimes with a deep-green edge, and with pink buds opening to blue flowers. **Good for:** Drought tolerance, superb foliage. **Grow as:** Ground cover under forsythias. **Height:** 20-30cm (8-12in.)

SHUTTERSTOCK

P. 'Sissinghurst White' AGM
Evergreen, prettily spotted foliage makes an ideal background for the pure-white flowers with never a hint of pink. **Good for:** A fresh, clean, pure-white display. **Grow with:** White hellebores, white daffodils. **Height:** 25-30cm (10-12in).

P. 'Majesté'
Unusually shiny, silver leaves with a fine green margin are rather upright and densely gathered. The pink flowers soon mature to blue. **Special feature:** Dense, very well-silvered leaves. **Good for:** Sparkling foliage. **Grow with:** Grape hyacinths (*Muscari*). **Height:** 25-30cm (10-12in).

Did you know... To keep the attractive silver markings on pulmonaria leaves, ensure they're grown in sufficiently shady conditions. Too much sun can cause the silver to fade. If leaves become damaged by slugs or mildew, cut them back entirely – new, fresh growth will soon appear, keeping your plants looking their best

Spurge
Euphorbia

Plant: early spring/ early autumn

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: -5 to -20°C

Propagate: spring cuttings

Spring euphorbias are ideal for Mediterranean-style plantings and drought gardens

Mediterranean euphorbias are unusual in that they can be said to be part shrub and part perennial. They develop a bold shrubby, evergreen structure, with the unbranched stems topped by large and striking heads of greenish or yellowish spring flowers. Some develop upright growth, while others lay flat on the ground. The stems then die away, to be replaced by new growth from the base. These are drought-tolerant, sun-loving plants that appreciate good drainage.

Hardy perennial euphorbias for spring borders

Behaving much more like so many other perennial plants, hardy perennial euphorbias are a small group. These euphorbias open their bright-yellow flower heads in spring and then often change colour through reddish tones as the foliage develops into a neat dome. All the shoots then die back for the winter before emerging freshly in early spring.

Euphorbia characias 'Portuguese Velvet'

Euphorbia epithymoides 'Major' AGM

Euphorbia mellifera AGM

Euphorbia amygdaloides 'Purpurea'

How to... Propagate

Euphorbias self-seed but can also be propagated by cuttings. In spring, find some short, new non-flowering shoots at the base of the plant. Snip them off at 4-6in (10-15cm) and snip off the leaves on the lower half. Insert them up to the lowest leaf joints in well-drained compost and cover with a polythene bag. They should be ready to pot on after a few weeks.

Did you know?

The milky sap of euphorbias is poisonous and is a skin and eye irritant

Always wear gloves. If you get sap on your hands, wash it off at once and stay out of the sun. Wear sunglasses or safety glasses if you have a habit of rubbing your eyes.

Top tip

- After flowering, cut the flowering stems of evergreen spurges out at the base
- Cut hardy perennial spurges to the ground in autumn
- Spring euphorbias are generally free of pests and diseases
- *Euphorbia cyparissias* is invasive

Elephant's ears

Bergenia

Plant: early autumn

Position: full sun - full shade

Hardiness: -15C to <-20°C

Propagate: division spring/autumn

These hardy weed-suppressing plants provide flower and foliage colour in one valuable ground-covering perennial

Sometimes, 'ground cover' sounds rather dull. It seems to describe a plant that is effective and functional but has little else going for it. It covers the ground, smothering and suppressing weeds – end of story. Not with Bergenias, oh no. These plants are among our most valuable hardy perennials. Combining bold, usually evergreen foliage, for which the common name of 'elephant's ears' is, for once, very apt with prolific spring flowers, bergenias would be worth growing if they suppressed no weeds at all!

Bergenias for flowers

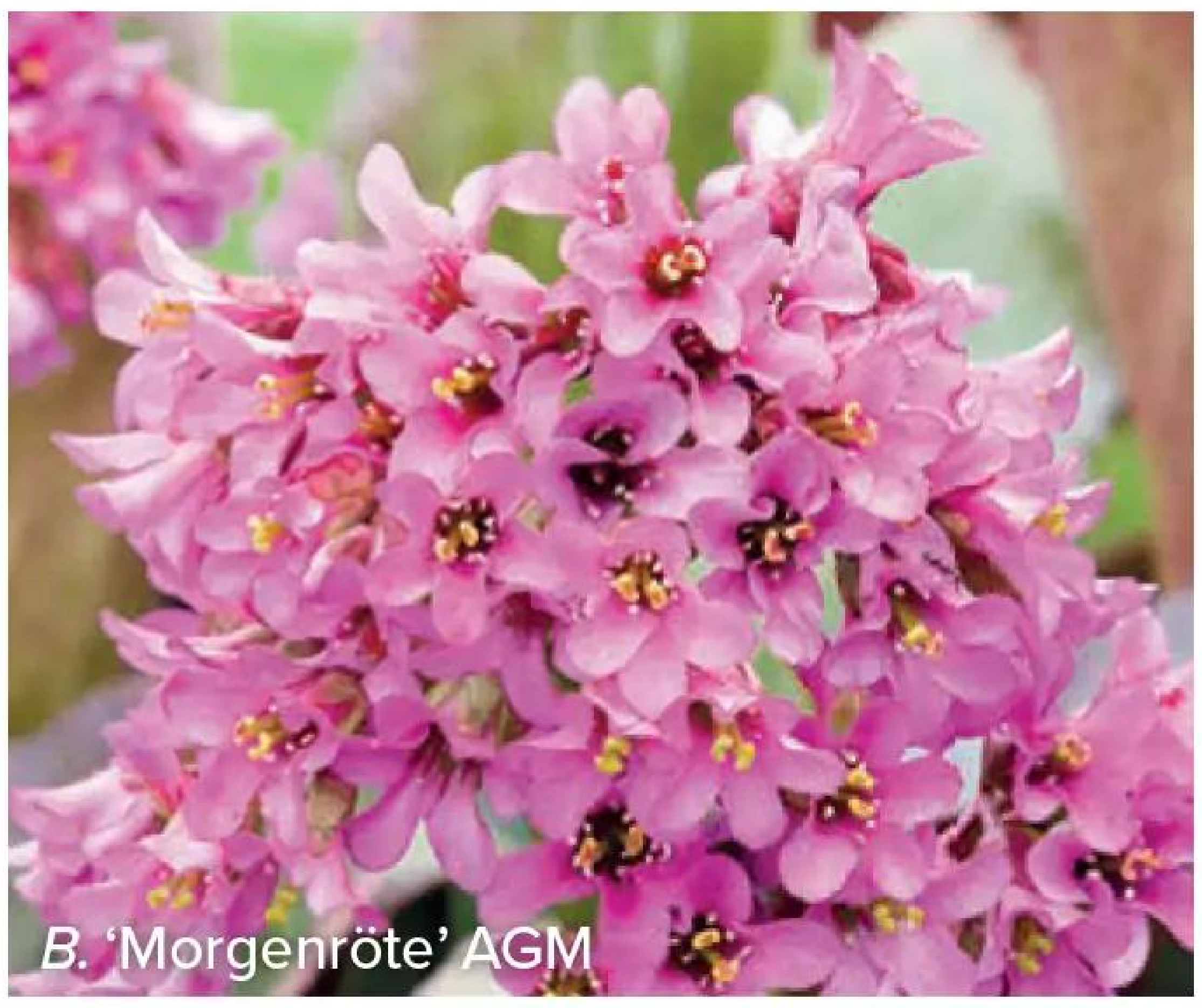
Bergenia flowers are like small bells, about ¾in (2cm) across, clustered at the tops of the rather fleshy stems in spring and early summer. In some, the dark bud scales create an attractive contrast with the petals.

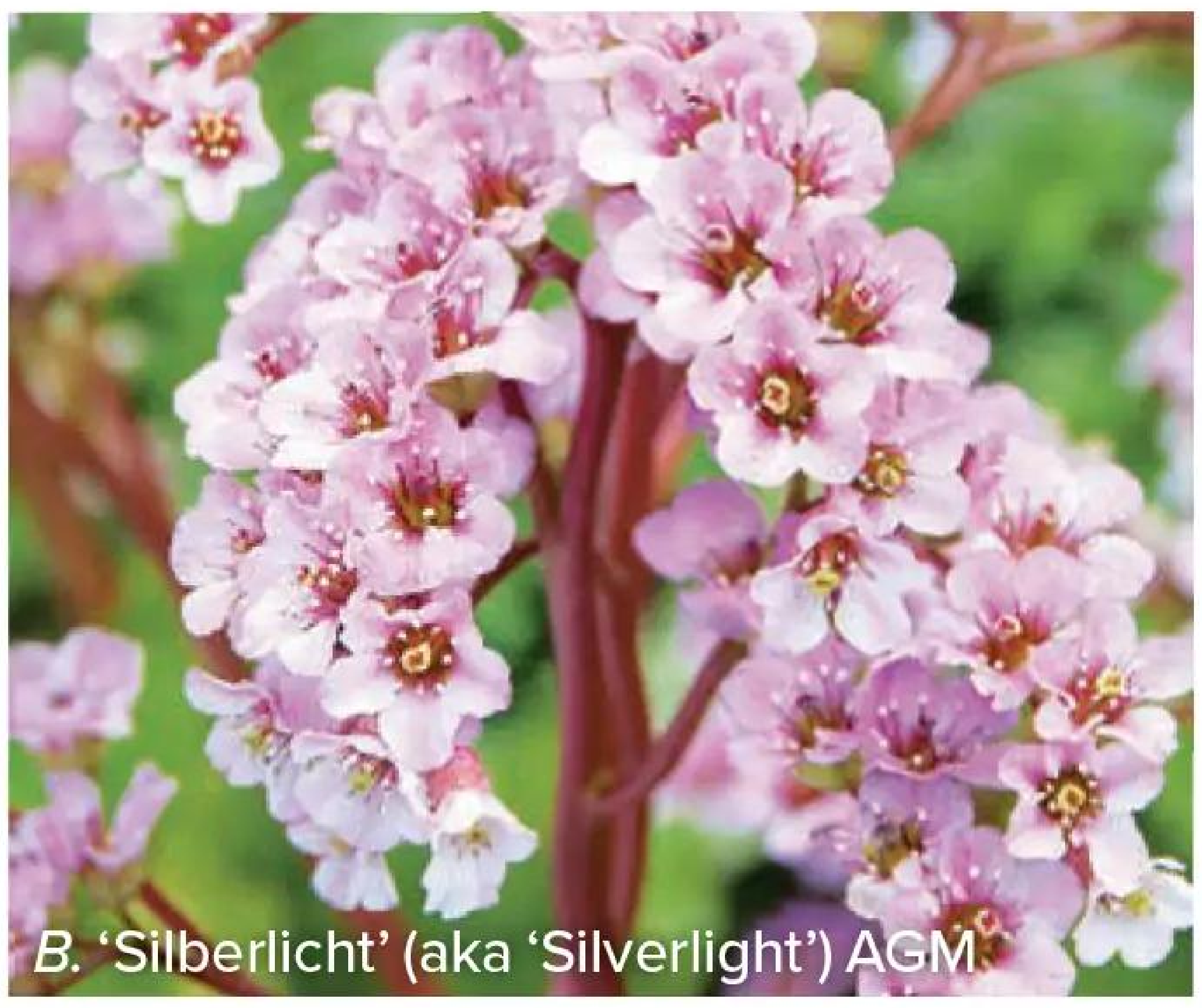
Reaching from about 8-20in (20-50cm) in height, the flowers vary from pure white, through blushed tones, to pinks, and to richer reddish and purple shades. Morning frosts may cause the stems to droop, but they usually stand up by midday.

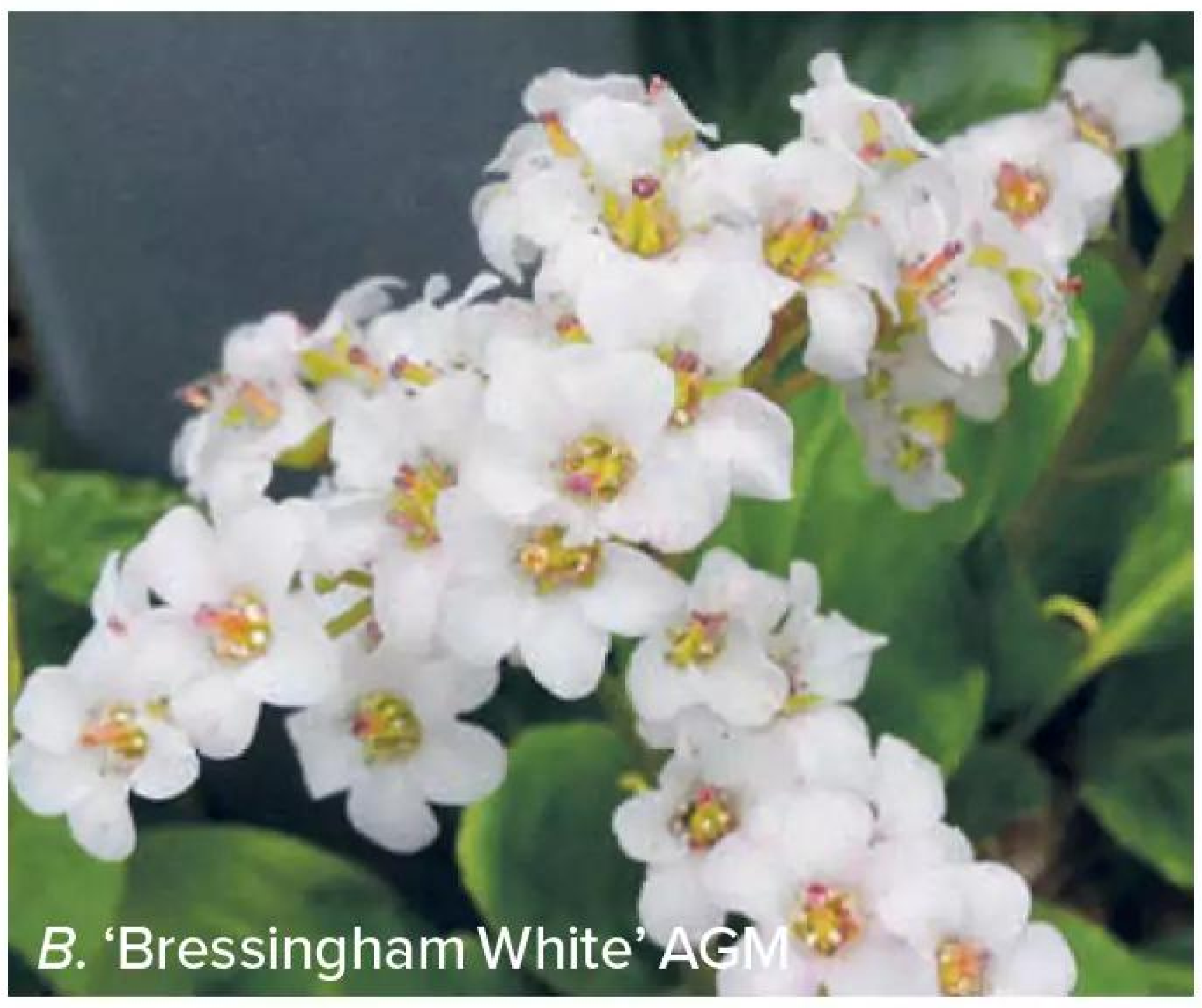
ALL PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

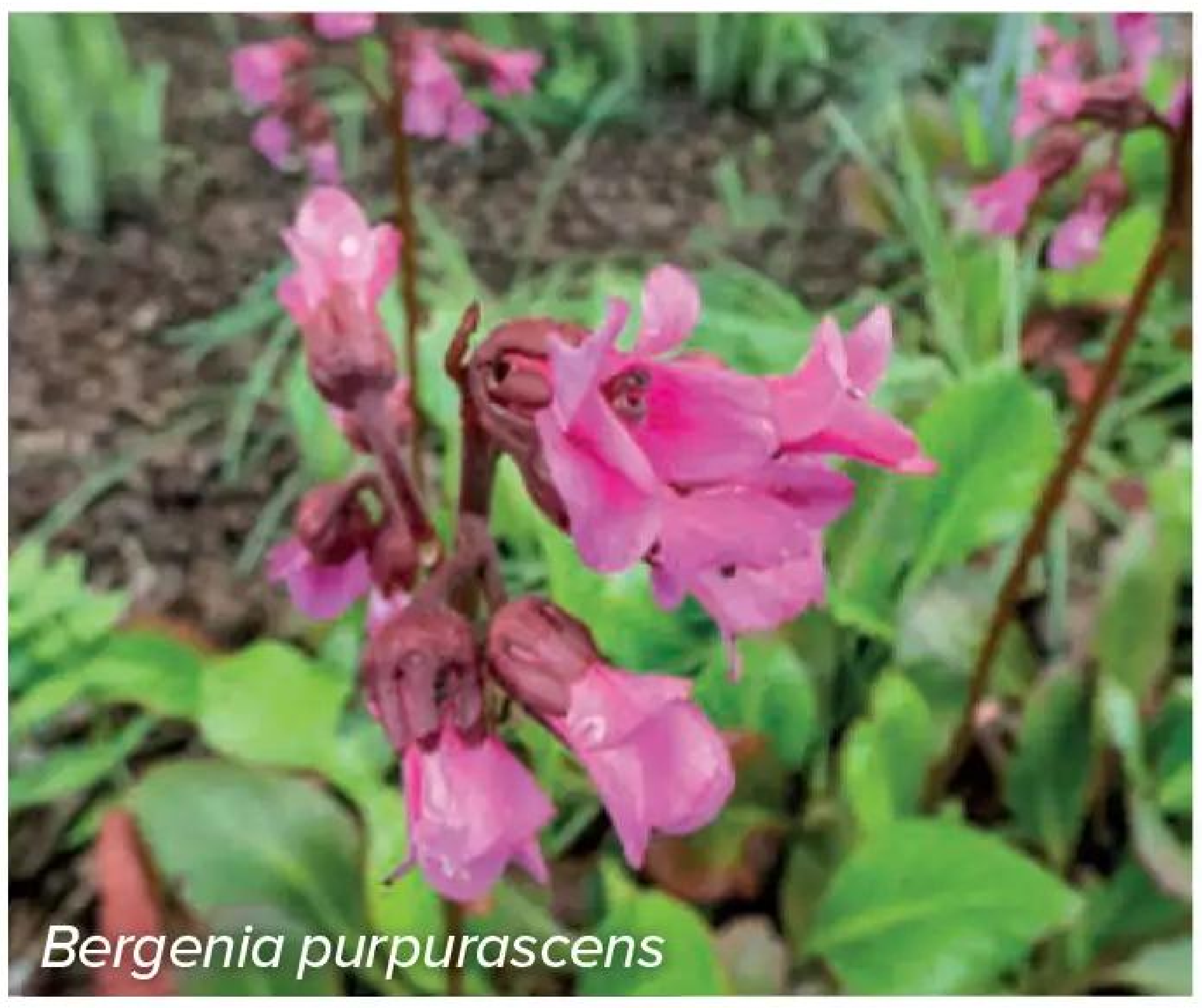
Top tips

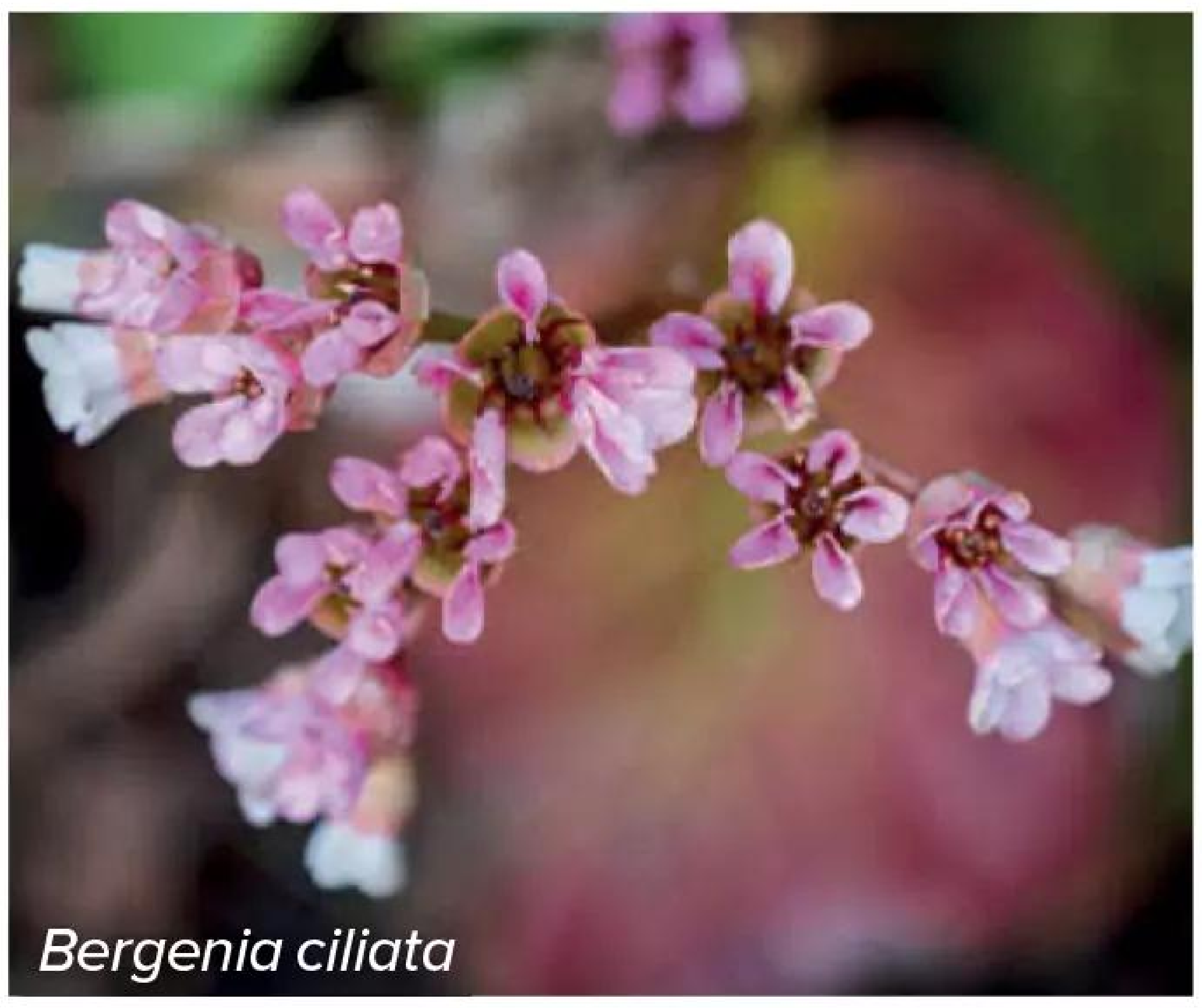
- Dislike extremes of heat and drought
- Remove flowered spikes
- Winter foliage colour is often the most dramatic in dry, sunny sites

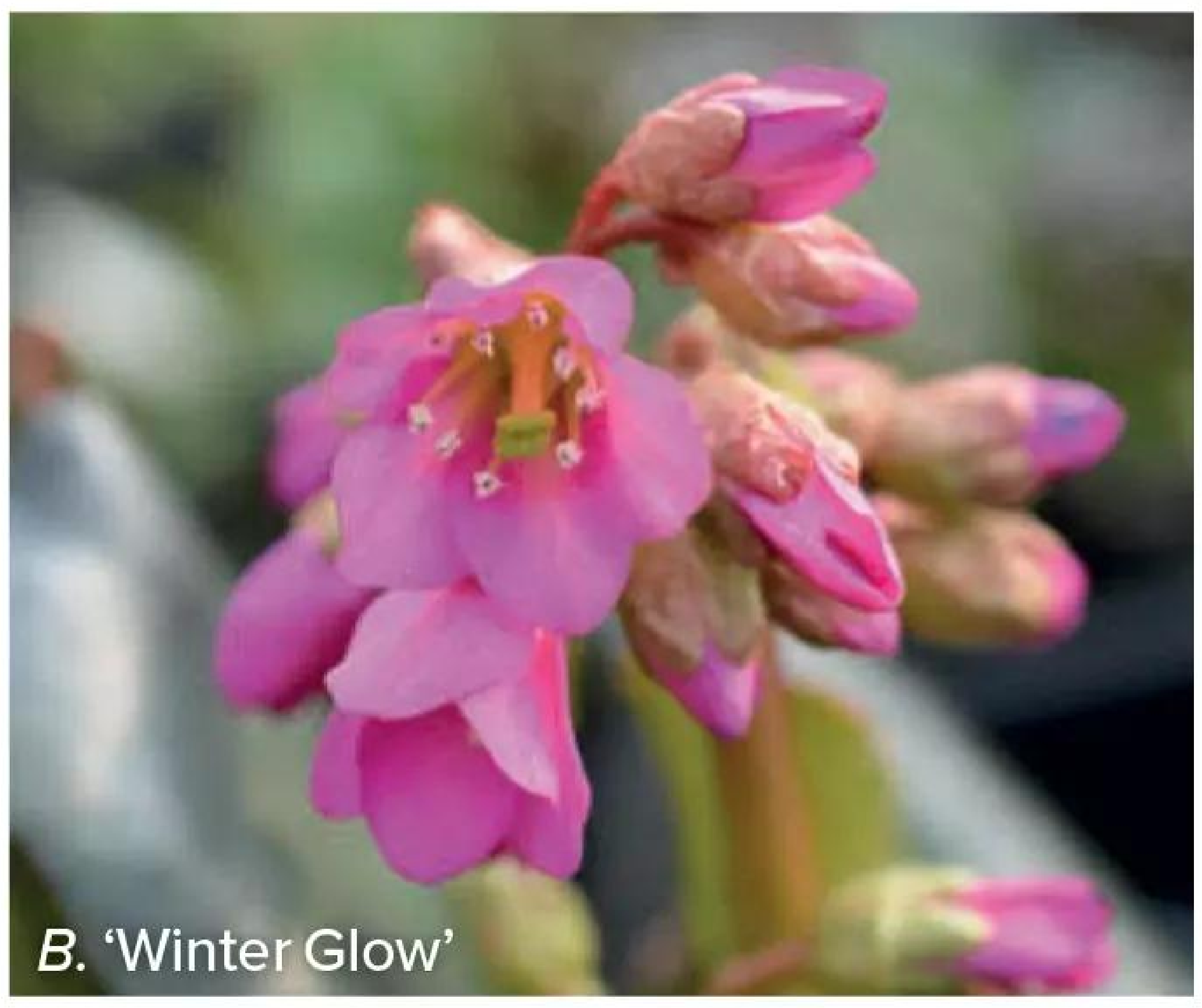

B. 'Morgenröte' AGM

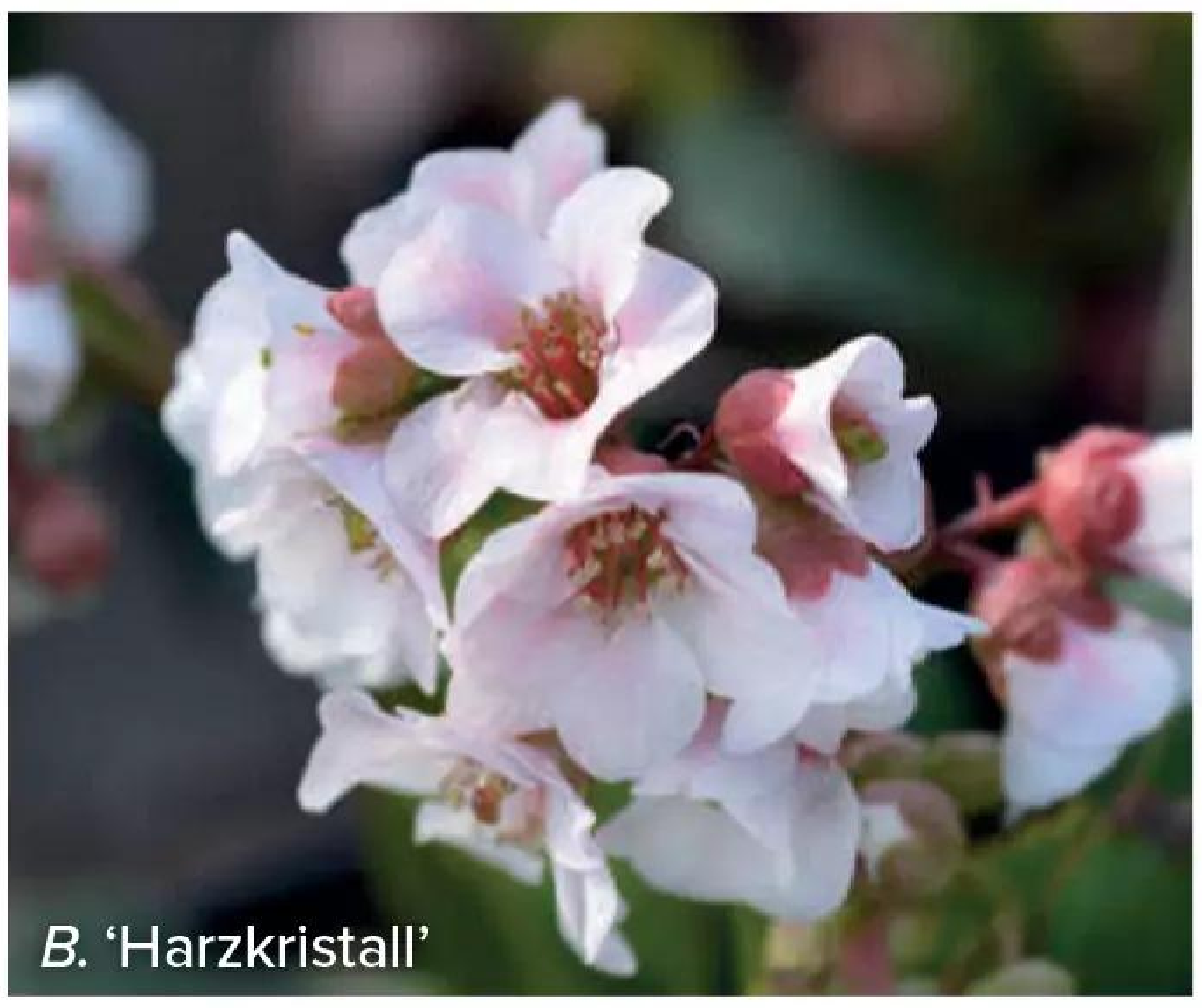

B. 'Silberlicht' (aka 'Silverlight') AGM

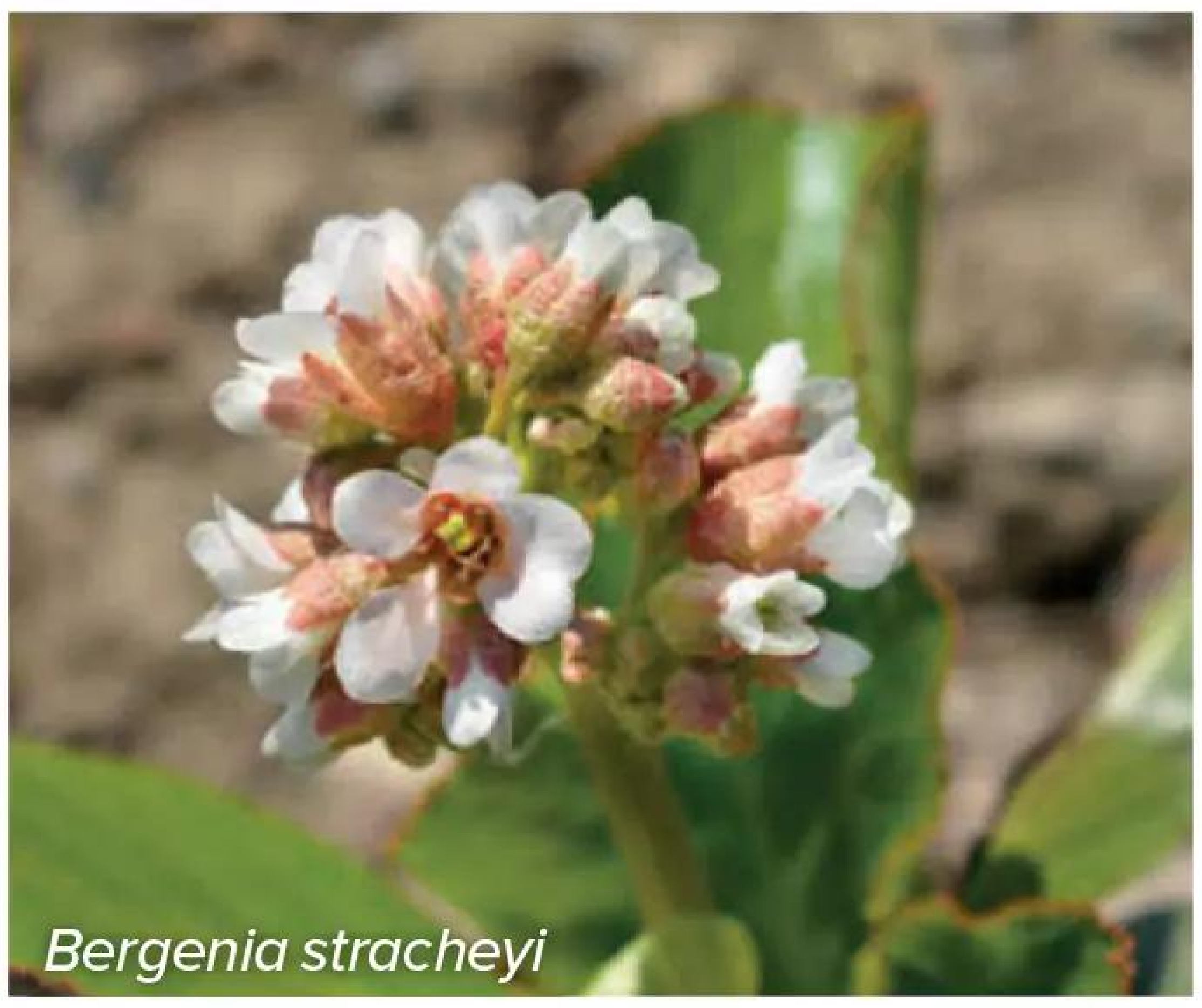

B. 'Bressingham White' AGM

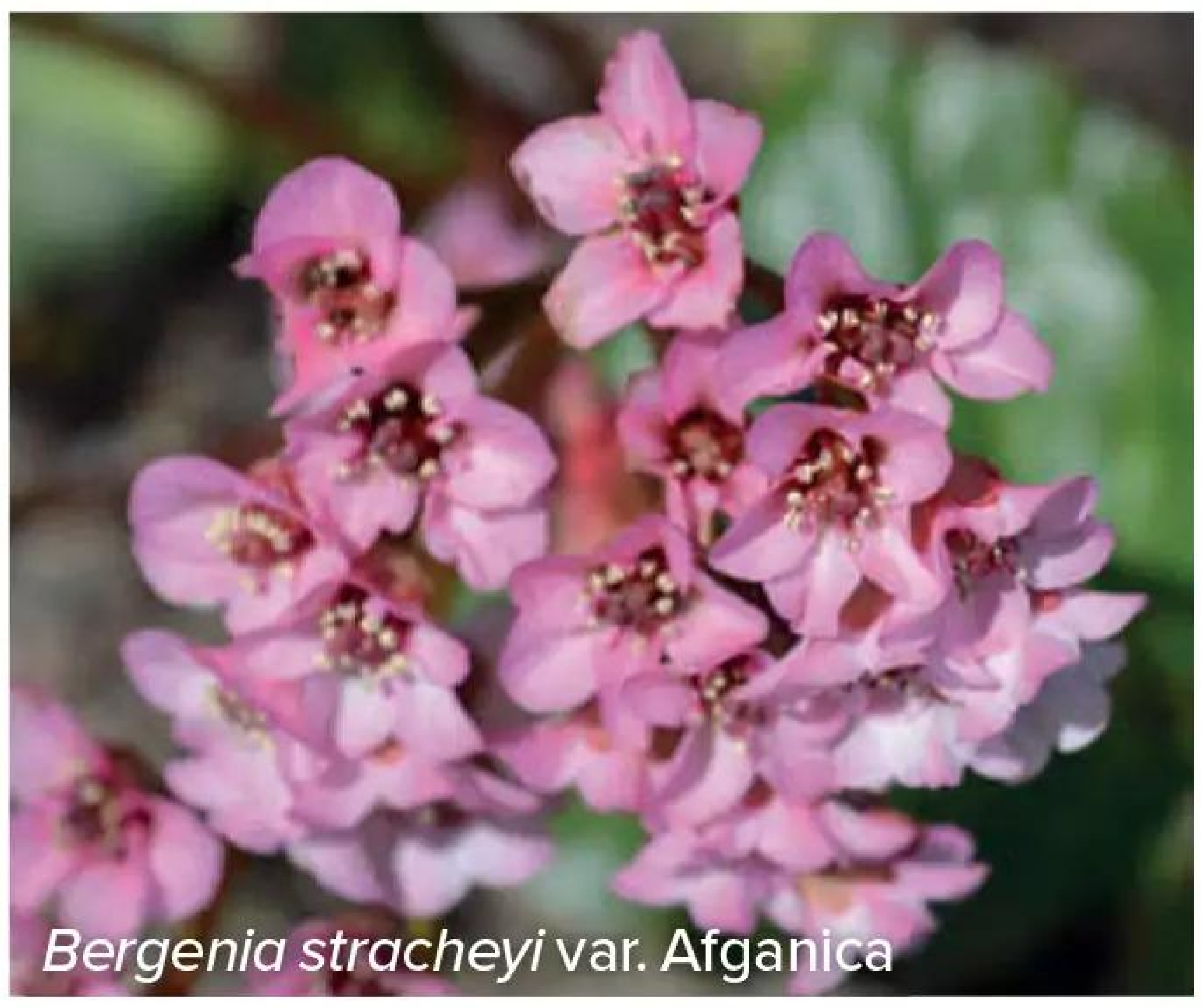

Bergenia purpurascens


Bergenia ciliata


B. 'Winter Glow'


B. 'Harzkristall'


Bergenia stracheyi


Bergenia stracheyi var. Afganica

Bergenias for foliage

The bold, slightly wrinkled, broadly rounded, rather leathery leaves are rich and shining green in summer, but in winter, many develop impressive colouring, from deep bronzed red or purple through to more vivid reds or, perhaps, the upper leaf surfaces green and the undersides richly coloured.

There are also one or two variegated varieties. The very best bergenia varieties combine good winter foliage with colourful spring flowers.

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Soil:** Adaptable and tough, bergenias do well in most soils and situations, including gravel gardens.
✿ **Care:** Remove the dying leaves as they turn black and mulch in autumn before any partnering spring bulbs emerge.
✿ **Position:** Frost may damage the first flowers, so grow where the plants get no early morning sun.
✿ **Propagation:** When clumps look thin in the centre, dig up the plants and replant the strongest pieces.

Pests & diseases

The roots and base clumps may be susceptible to vine weevils and slugs and snails. Use natural control treatments.

Can be susceptible to a leaf spot. Water the plants at the base to avoid getting the leaves wet. Morning watering is preferable so the leaves can dry quickly. Ensure the plants are spaced adequately to allow for good air circulation, which helps reduce humidity around the leaves. Remove and dispose of affected leaves to prevent the spread.

Wallflowers

Erysimium

Plant: autumn

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: -10° to -20°C

Propagate: semi-hardwood cuttings spring/early summer

Often used as bedding plants, wallflowers offer a lot as perennials

Wallflowers are one of those slightly old-fashioned plants that are often overlooked by modern gardeners, yet with their good scent and vibrant colours, they make an excellent addition to any spring garden. They are short-lived perennials and will survive and flower for a few years, but most people tend to treat them as bedding plants, planting them in the autumn for a good show the following spring, then removing them after flowering to make way for other things.

Available in shades of yellow, orange, red, purple, and white, many varieties have a sweet, honey-like scent. They have a long blooming period, flowering from spring through to summer, and are suitable for beds, borders, and containers. They may even self-seed into nearby walls!

The most common way to buy wallflowers is as bare-rooted plants, often wrapped in damp newspaper! They're very good value as each one will form a compact bushy plant up to 50cm across and they are a great source of food for pollinators early in the year.

Did you know?

Wallflowers are brassicas. This means they can be susceptible to flea beetle and clubroot, just like your cabbages!

'Walberton's Fragrant Sunshine'

'Golden Bedder'

Erysimum 'Red Jep'

SHUTTERSTOCK

GROWING ADVICE

- Plant in autumn when the soil is still warm. After planting, water generously, firm the soil around them and protect them from slugs, ideally with wool pellets. If you use organic chemical pellets, hide one or two under an old tile. The slugs will crawl underneath looking for shelter and eat the pellets, but they'll be out of the way of foraging hedgehogs.
- Deadhead regularly to promote continuous blooming
- Pinch back young plants to encourage bushiness
- Provide support for taller varieties
- In hot climates, provide afternoon shade
- Mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds

Planting bare root wallflowers

1. Bare root wallflowers are usually bought in plastic or paper and should be stood in water for at least 30 minutes before planting.
2. Plant them at the same depth as the 'tide mark' around their roots in dappled sunlight. Give them plenty of room to grow, and water them well.

Summer sizzle!

Hot hues, cool pastels and flowers a-plenty

✿ Rose ✿ Poppy ✿ Iris ✿ Allium ✿ Nicotiana
✿ Echinacea ✿ Dahlia ✿ Salvia ✿ Peony
✿ Lupin ✿ Penstemon ✿ Cranesbill
✿ Hemerocallis ✿ Cosmos

Roses

Rosaceae

Plant: bare-root winter/pots all year

Position: full sun / light shade

Hardiness: to -20°C

Propagate: late autumn/early winter

Nothing says 'summer' quite like the scent and sight of a garden full of roses

First cultivated in China over 5,000 years ago, roses were introduced to the UK by the Romans. Today, they symbolise love and romance and whether you prefer rich reds, pretty pinks, sunshine yellows, or intriguing oranges, roses come in nearly every colour imaginable. With such a vast selection of plants available, each with unique colours, scents, flower shapes, and growth habits, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Never fear, we have some great advice that will help get you started with choosing the best option for your situation; borders, vertical spaces or pots.

Important considerations

When selecting roses, consider their growing location and what you want to achieve. Climbing cultivars are perfect for walls, while ramblers thrive on fences or in trees. Roses vary in size, from tall shrubs to ground-covering varieties, and many can be grown in large tubs. Some, like 'Golden Beauty' and 'Sweet Haze', are ideal for hedging. Look for independent evaluations of rose performance, such as the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit (AGM) or the Rose of the Year accolade from Roses UK. These

Top tips

- Apply a proprietary rose feed at the start of the season and after the first bloom for repeat-flowering varieties
- Lightly prune new roses after their first year of flowering to help establish strong roots. Remove dead, damaged stems and any remaining foliage over winter

awards are given based on extensive trials assessing disease resistance, flower quality, scent, and colour.

Bare-root or potted?

Potted roses can be bought and planted year-round and, as the name suggests, they come in soil-filled pots. Because they're grown in compost they need to be fed, watered and looked after before they're sold, so they're slightly more expensive to buy and post. Depending on the season, they may have flowers and foliage.

If you don't mind planning ahead, bare-root roses are available from October to March. These are sold without soil and foliage, which makes them more affordable. They are an excellent choice for budget-conscious gardeners looking to plant during the dormant season. These roses focus on root development during winter and typically need less watering until the hotter months. They establish quickly and strongly, and get off to a good start in their first spring after planting in the winter.

PLANTING & CARE

When planting roses, the graft should be above soil-level.

Roses thrive in sunlight, needing at least four hours per day. Lighter-coloured roses are ideal for shadier garden areas as they stand out more, while darker varieties may blend into the shadows.

Although roses are versatile, preparing the planting hole is crucial. Dig a big enough to accommodate the rootball you're planting, breaking up the soil at the bottom. Enrich the soil with well-rotted garden compost and a general fertiliser then plant the rose so the graft sits at soil-level. Backfill, firm in, and water well.

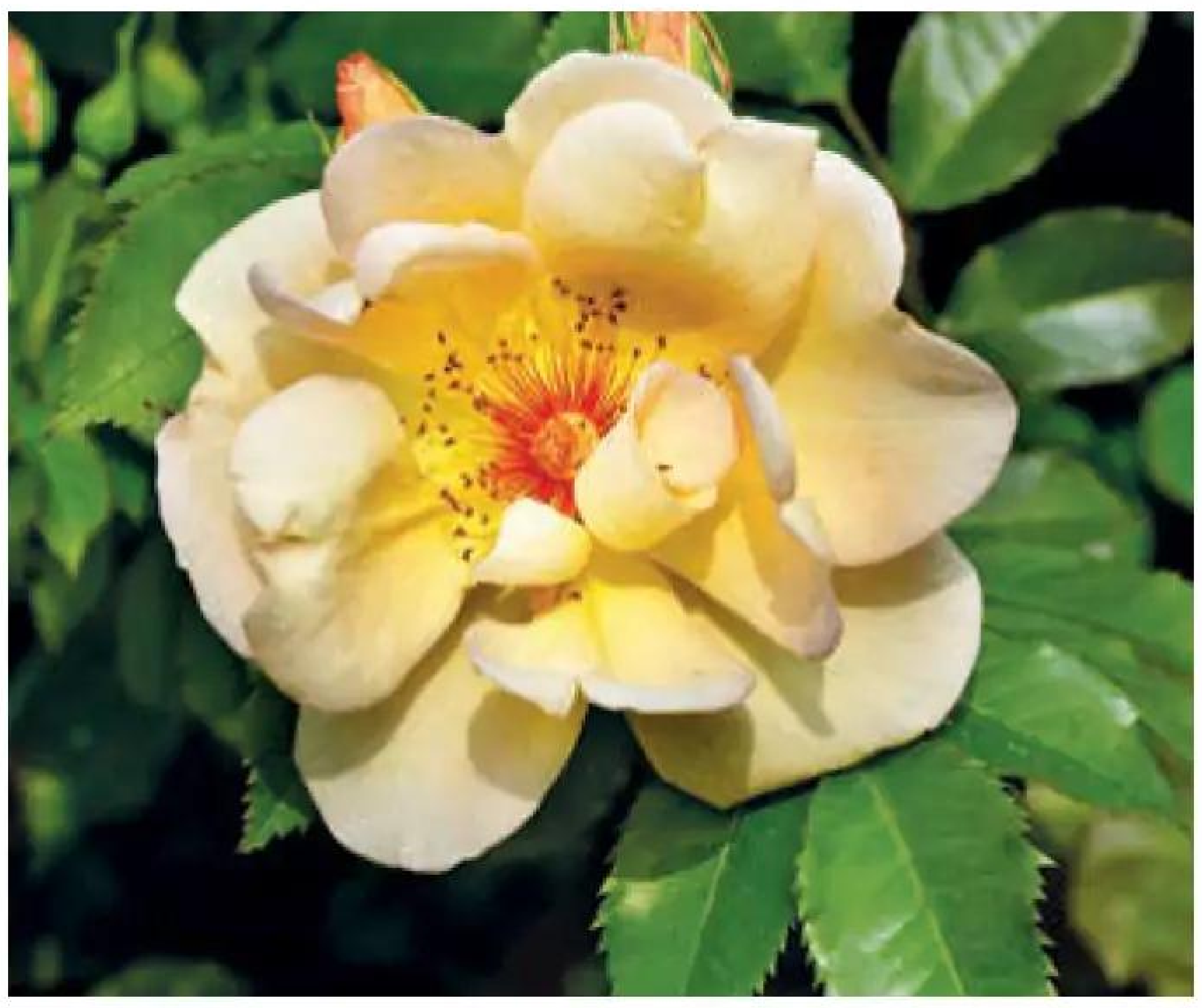
For smaller spaces, use patio or miniature roses in large containers filled with John Innes No 3 compost, burying the base of the stems by about 5cm.

Feed roses at the start of the season with a proprietary rose feed. For repeat-flowering varieties, feed again after the first bloom. Mulching around the base helps retain moisture and suppress weeds, reducing the need for frequent watering.

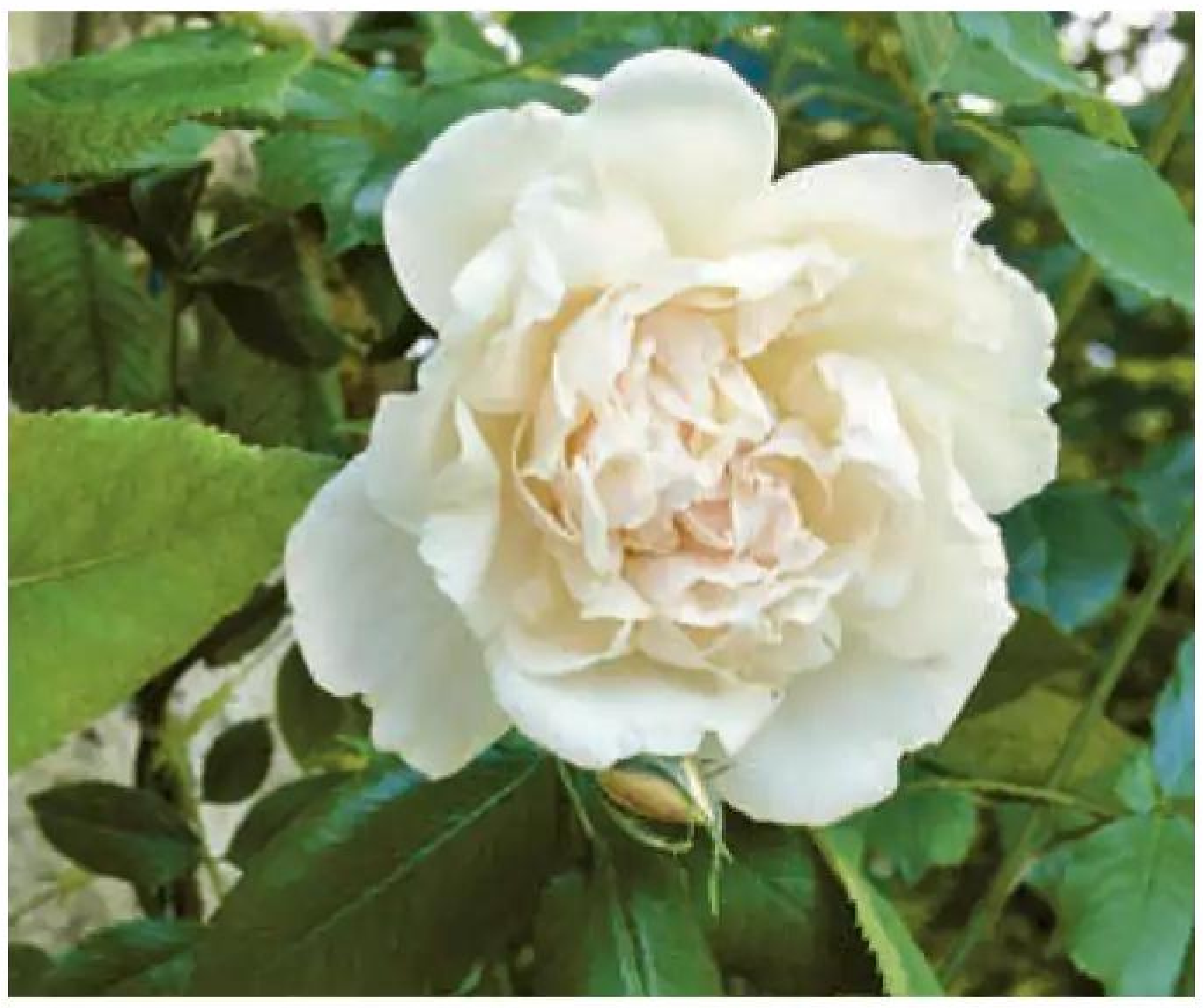
How to… Support climbing roses

No other plant can provide a better wall of colour than roses in summer. The best support for climbing roses, such as the wonderfully scented '*Zéphirine Drouhin*', is wires strung horizontally between vine eyes

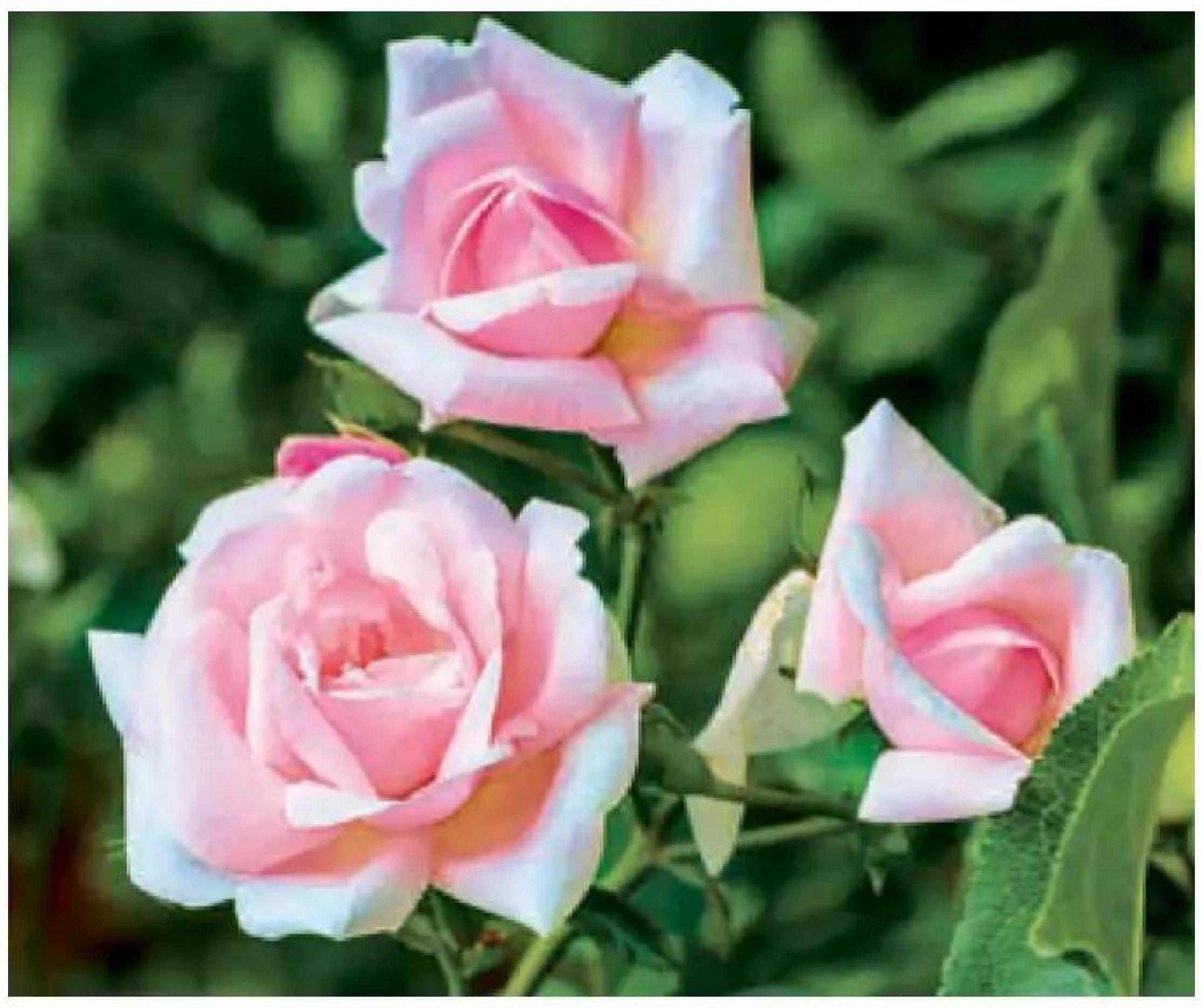
3 CLIMBING ROSES



'Maigold' AGM
Coppery-apricot flowers, fading to pale yellow, open in a colourful early flush, with a scattering later in the summer. Colour seems richer in cool seasons. **Flowers:** Repeat, late spring to first frosts **Fragrance:** Strong musk **Growth:** Medium vigour **Height:** 5.5m (18ft)



'Madame Alfred Carrière' AGM
Long, pale-pink buds quickly fade to white and ruffled as they open but remain open for a long time and keep opening through the summer. **Flowers:** Repeat, late spring to]first frosts **Fragrance:** Strong and fruity **Growth:** Strong growing **Height:** 7.5m (25ft)



'New Dawn' AGM
Large, beautifully formed, pale-pink flowers open continually for months, once widely grown for cutting. Voted the world's favourite rose in 1997. **Flowers:** Repeat, late spring to first frosts **Fragrance:** Medium, fruity **Growth:** Strong growing **Height:** 4.5m (15ft)

3 BUSH ROSES – *Floribunda shrubs*

'Arthur Bell' AGM
Beautiful large golden yellow double flowers combine with a delightful perfume and bright green foliage in this classic. This upright repeat-flowering bush rose grows to up to 90cm (35ins) and is great for borders or containers. It copes well in poor soils. **Flowers:** early summer to first frosts **Fragrance:** Strongly scented **Growth:** Medium vigour **Height:** 0.5-1m (1.6-3.3ft)

'It's a Wonderful Life' (Dictwix)
Flowers that change colour and a delicate fragrance are just two of the qualities that caught the eye of judges searching for the Rose of the Year 2022. This robust multi-petalled shrub rose has an upright habit and dark, glossy foliage and was bred for disease resistance. **Flowers:** July to September **Fragrance:** Delicate **Growth:** Strong growing **Height:** 1m (39")

'Lovestruck®' 9 (Dicommatac)
A prolific flowerer that's at home in borders or containers, Lovestruck® brightens the garden with masses of cherry red double blooms and dark green foliage. This bush rose has been bred to offer good disease resistance. Rose of the Year in 2018. **Flowers:** Late spring to first frosts **Fragrance:** Slight **Growth:** Medium vigour **Height:** 1m (3ft)

3 RAMBLING ROSES

'American Pillar'
White-eyed, magenta-pink single flowers open late, and are followed by decorative scarlet hips. This variety roots easily from hardwood cuttings. **Flowers:** Once, mid-summer **Fragrance:** Light fragrance **Growth:** Strong growing **Height:** 6m (20ft)

'The Garland' AGM
Huge conical clusters of up to 40 slender buds open to upturned, slightly quilled flowers in peachy-pink and fading to white. **Flowers:** Once, mid-summer **Fragrance:** Strong, fruity scent **Growth:** Strong growing **Height:** 4.5m (15ft)

'Veilchenblau' AGM
Crimson-purple buds lose their purple tint as flowers open but develop white streaks. Almost thornless, and happier than most in shade. **Flowers:** Once, mid-summer **Fragrance:** Medium strong, fruity **Growth:** Strong growing **Height:** 4.5m (15ft)

Don't forget to... Deadhead roses throughout the growing season. Use clean, sharp secateurs to cut just above the first set of five leaves or a healthy bud eye on the stem. Regularly inspect your roses and deadhead as soon as the flowers start to fade

PRUNING

General

Prune roses in March or April before new growth starts. Remove dead, diseased, or dying stems, and cut remaining stems by half, making sure to prune to an outward-facing bud. Light pruning is recommended after the first year of flowering to help establish strong roots.

Roses have several different growth habits, and each needs to be pruned differently:

✿ **Climbers** Climbing roses are pruned in late winter. All the side shoots that have carried flowers are pruned back to two or three buds and the very oldest growth is cut out at the base. Look at the main stems and decide whether to cut back any older ones to encourage new growth from lower down. Tie the rest in horizontally, then shorten the side-shoots.

✿ **Ramblers** Rambling roses are pruned by cutting out the oldest and weakest growth at the base of the plant immediately after flowering. If hips are expected, pruning can be delayed until late winter when the birds have stripped them all. It may be impractical to prune many ramblers as they simply grow too tall.

After pruning, apply a good balanced feed to support new growth

✿ **Shrubs** The best time to prune shrub roses is in late winter or early spring, just as the buds are beginning to swell but before new growth starts. This is typically around March or early April in the UK. Remove any dead, diseased, or damaged branches first. Cut back to healthy wood, just above an outward-facing bud or a healthy leaf junction.

Cut out any branches that are crossing or rubbing against each other to prevent damage and improve air circulation within the plant. Aim to create an open, vase-like shape with a clear centre. This allows light and air to penetrate the plant, reducing the risk of disease. Cut back the remaining stems to shape the plant. Typically, reduce the height by about one-third, making cuts just above an outward-facing bud.

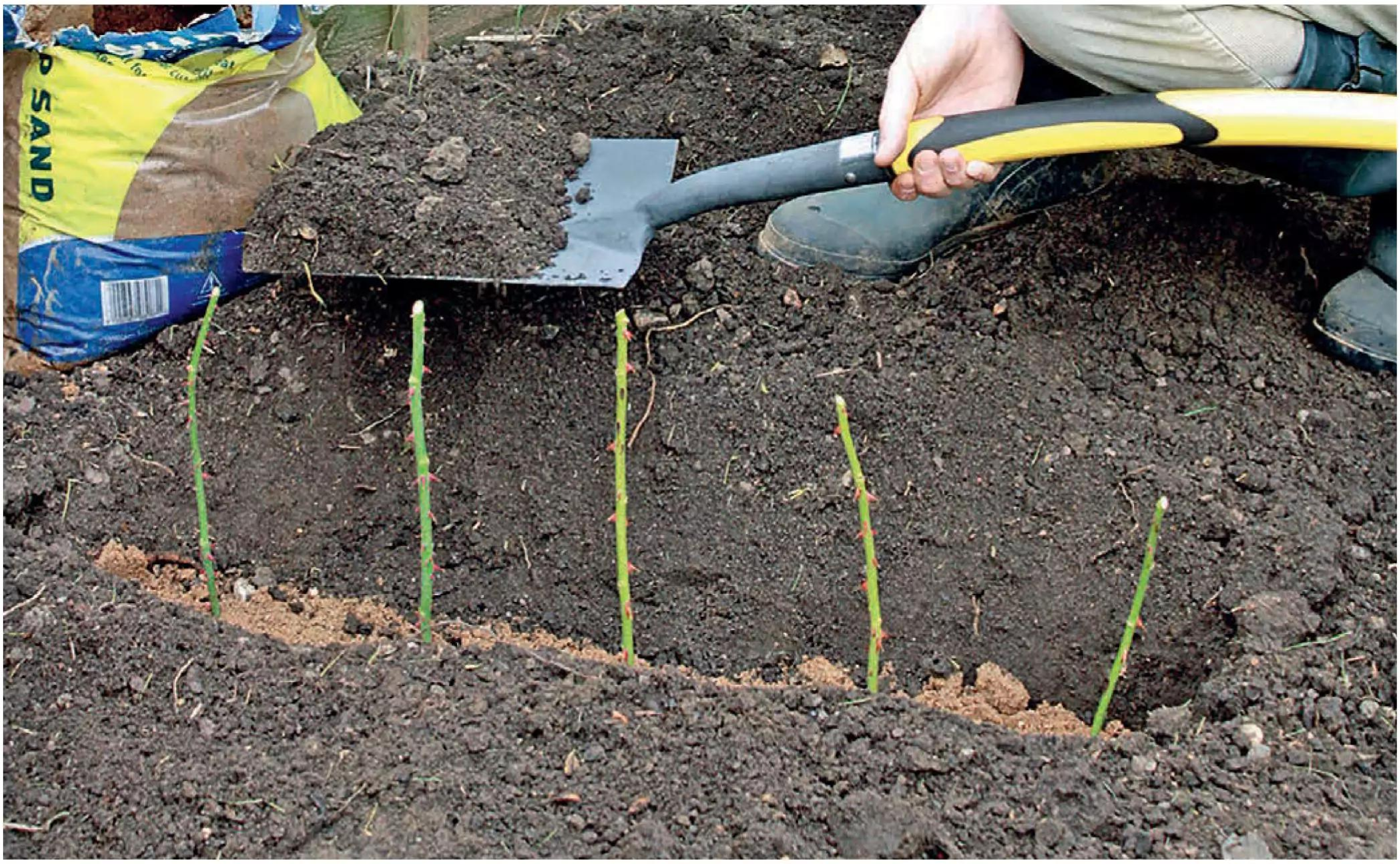
Aftercare

- After pruning, apply a balanced rose fertiliser to support new growth.
- Mulch around the base of the plant to retain moisture and suppress weeds.
- Ensure the plant is well-watered, especially during dry spells, to support recovery and growth.

Rambling roses are usually pruned by cutting out flowered stems after flowering

Top tips

- Prune annually to maintain shape and encourage growth
- Don't remove more than one-third of the plant in a single season to avoid stressing the rose
- Ensure all cuts are clean to prevent disease. Disinfect your tools before and after pruning each plant



Cuttings... Alternative to pots

Make a V-shaped slit in the ground in a sunny place and work the spade back and forth to create a slit about 2-3in (5-7.5cm) wide at the top. Add some sand, then insert each cutting with the horizontal cut at the base, so about two-thirds of its length is buried. Place cuttings 6in (15cm) apart, then firm well with your foot to close the V.

PROGAGATION

Roses can be propagated from cuttings taken in late autumn or early winter. Some varieties make roots easily, some hardly at all.

First, cut lengths of stem from branches that grew earlier in the year and that about as thick as a pencil. Each should be about 30cm (12in) long. Trim the base of each just below a leaf joint and trim the top just above a leaf joint. This should leave you with a cutting about 23-25cm (9-10in) long.

Choose a pot about 20cm (8in) deep, fill with fresh, moist multipurpose compost, tap it to settle it, then push each cutting about half way into the compost. Water in and place the pot in a sheltered place outdoors. In spring, roots should be emerging from the pot and the rooted cuttings can be planted in the ground or moved into larger pots.

Most roses will readily root from cuttings.

Pests and diseases

Modern rose breeds offer excellent disease resistance, and healthy plants find it easier to to fend off common issues like **blackspot** and **powdery mildew**. For black spot, remove and dispose of any leaves that show early signs and never add them to the compost heap. Mulch generously around your rose to bury any disease spores. Spray new leaves with a fungicide such as Rose Clear Ultra or Provanto Fungus Fighter, applying repeatedly through the growing season.

Aphids can be removed by hand or with a quick squirt from a hose. There are organic sprays available if you prefer, and planting garlic, chives, thyme, or mint nearby can also help deter pests.

Poppies

Papaveraceae

Plant: autumn or spring
Position: full sun
Hardiness: 1-5°C
Propagate: autumn or spring

Annual poppies are great for poor soils, easy to grow, and look spectacular

Every garden needs pockets of easy-going cheerfulness and colour, and poppies are low-maintenance hardy annuals that thrive in poor soil but need full sun to perform their best.

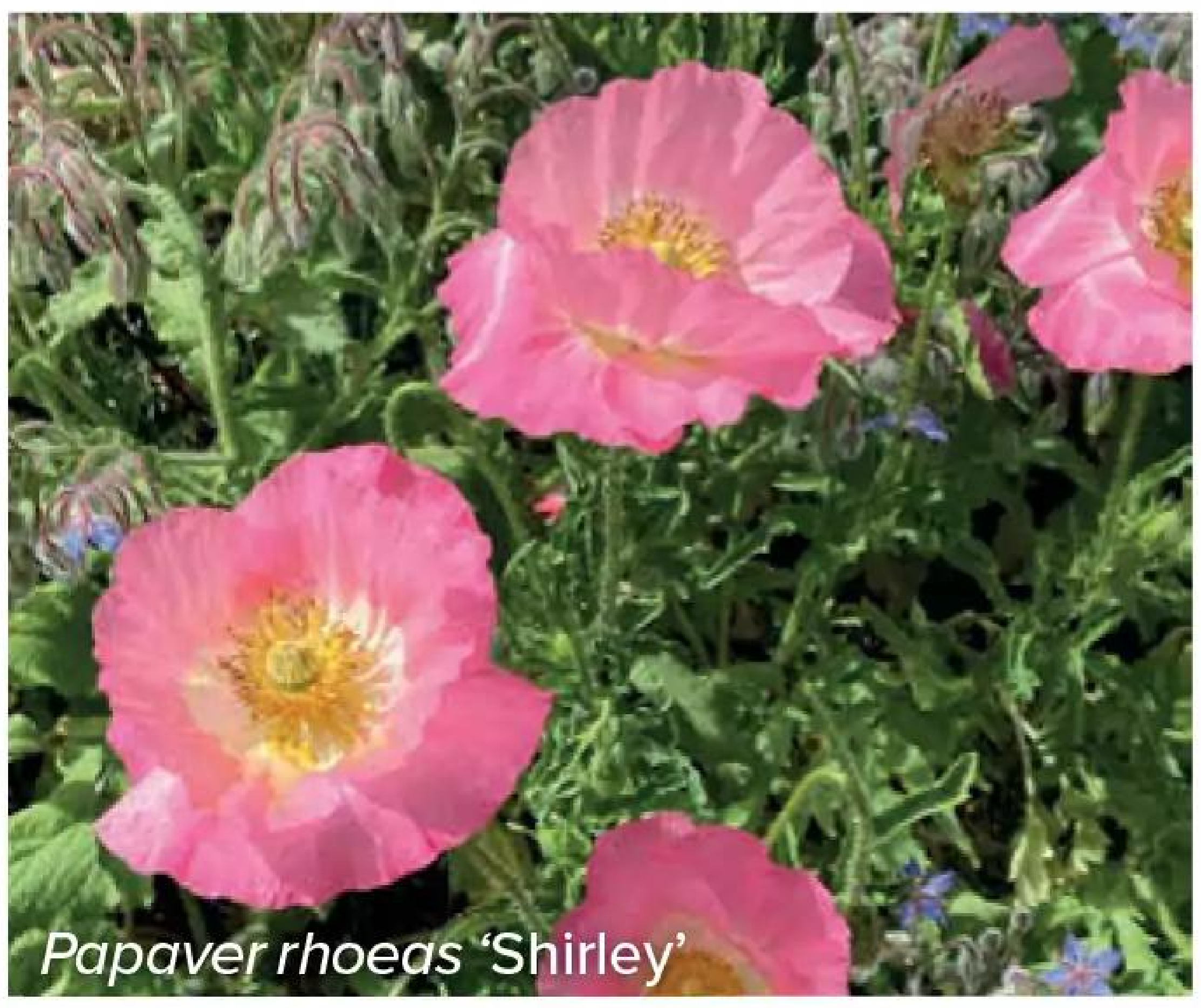
The red, common poppy we immediately think of is *Papaver rhoeas*, as too is the Shirley cultivar, with its pastel pinks and creams. The Iceland poppy is *P. nudicaule* and comes in yellow, varying shades of orange, and white.

Each poppy flower only lasts a day. Their petals are tissue-thin, rising on stiff hairy stems above deeply cut leaves that are covered in fine hairs and form a rosette at the base of the plant.

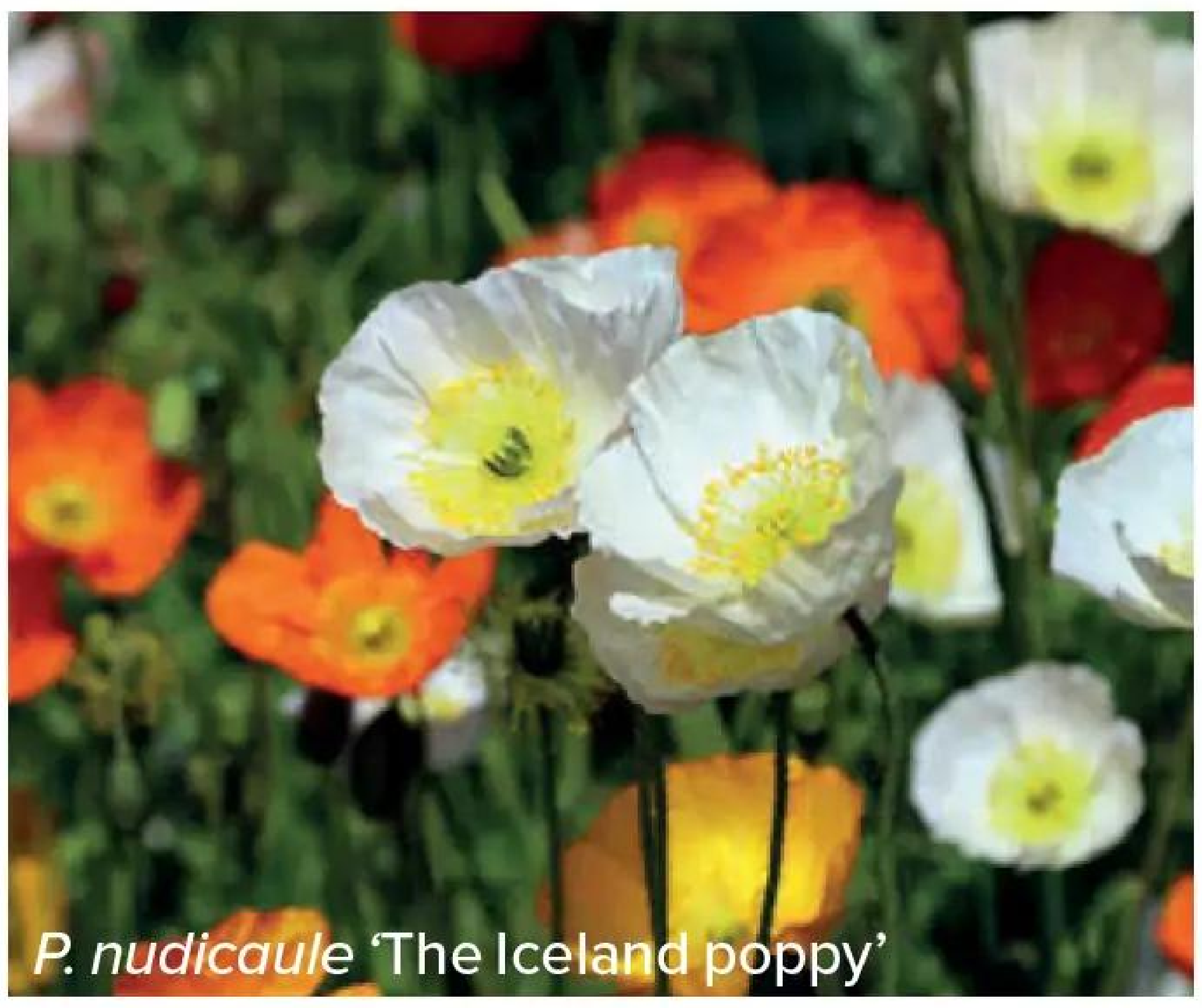
The petals of the 'California poppy' – *Eschscholzia californica*, but since its habit is very similar, it's included here – are thicker than those of *P. rhoeas* and have a satiny texture. The natural colour is an eye-popping orange, but some cultivars produce flowers in creamy white, pink, white with pink/red markings, red, and yellow.

The leaves are blue/grey green and very finely divided, making them attractive plants in their own right. The seed heads are long and curved and will explode when ripe, scattering the seeds.

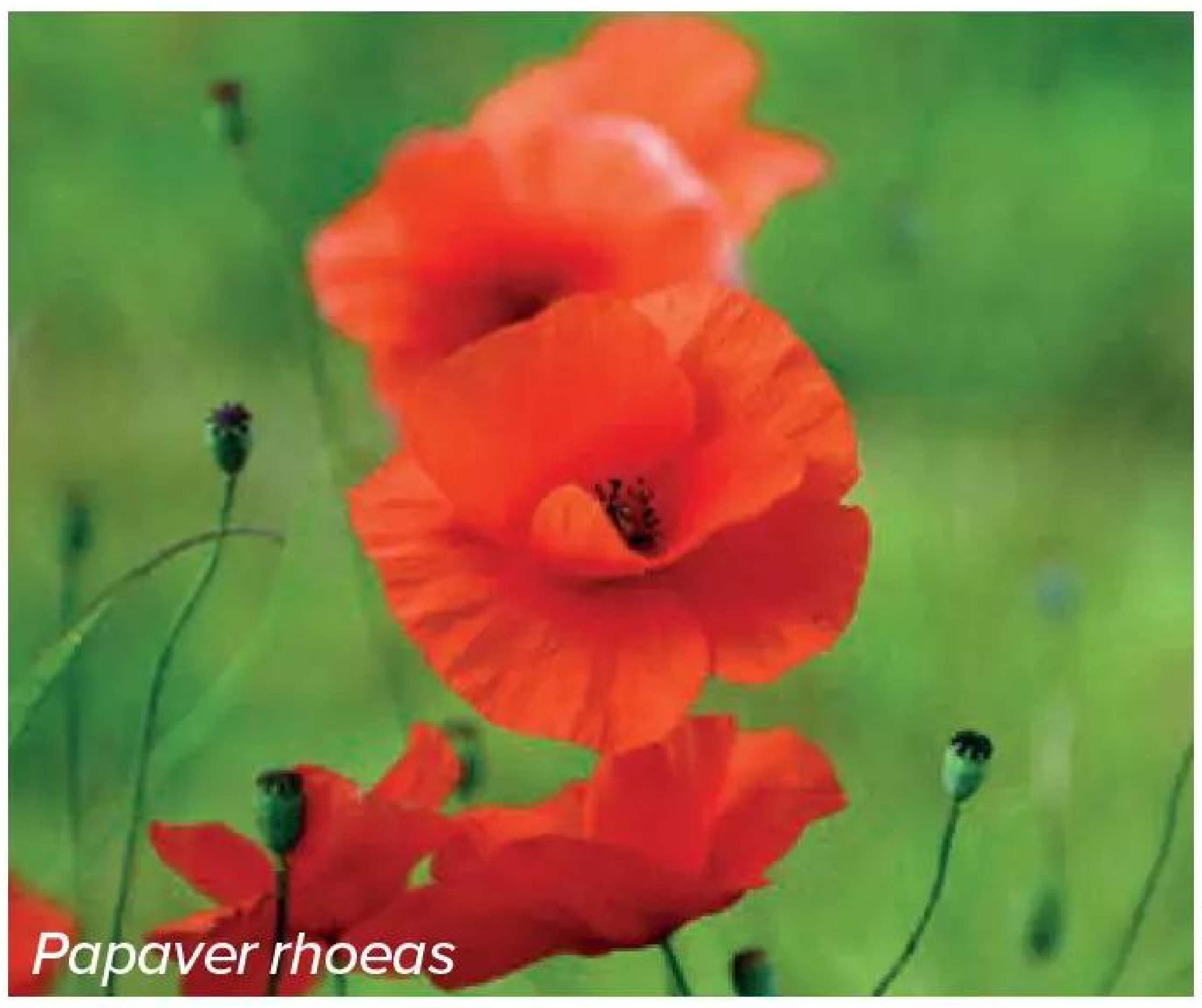
Poppies can flower from June to October, and if you sow some in September and more in the spring, you will have plants maturing at different times, giving you a longer window for blooming. They are also prolific self-seeders, so expect more plants to crop up in future years.



Papaver rhoeas 'Shirley'



P. nudicaule 'The Iceland poppy'



Papaver rhoeas

ADOBE

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position**: Full sun, well-drained soil

✿ **Hardiness:** Will tolerate low temperatures, but not freezing: 1-5°C

✿ **Planting:** Scatter the seeds as thinly as you can over soil that has been weeded and raked to a fine crumble. Seedlings can be thinned later if necessary. Rake a little more soil over the seeds, lightly firm it down, and then add a label to remind you not to disturb the soil.

✿ **Propagation:** Poppies will liberally self-seed, and the seeds can lie dormant in the soil for years. As well as letting them shake their pepperpot seed cases, liberally spreading hundreds of tiny seeds around the surrounding area, you can collect them and sow them in specific places too.

Top tips

- Annual poppies thrive in poor soil and will happily self-seed into gravel and paths
- Plant in full sun for the flowers to open
- Great for drought tolerance

Irises

Iridacae

Plant: mid-summer – October

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: to <-20°C

Propagate: mid-late summer

Irises are a statement plant and when planted en-masse, the effect is breathtaking

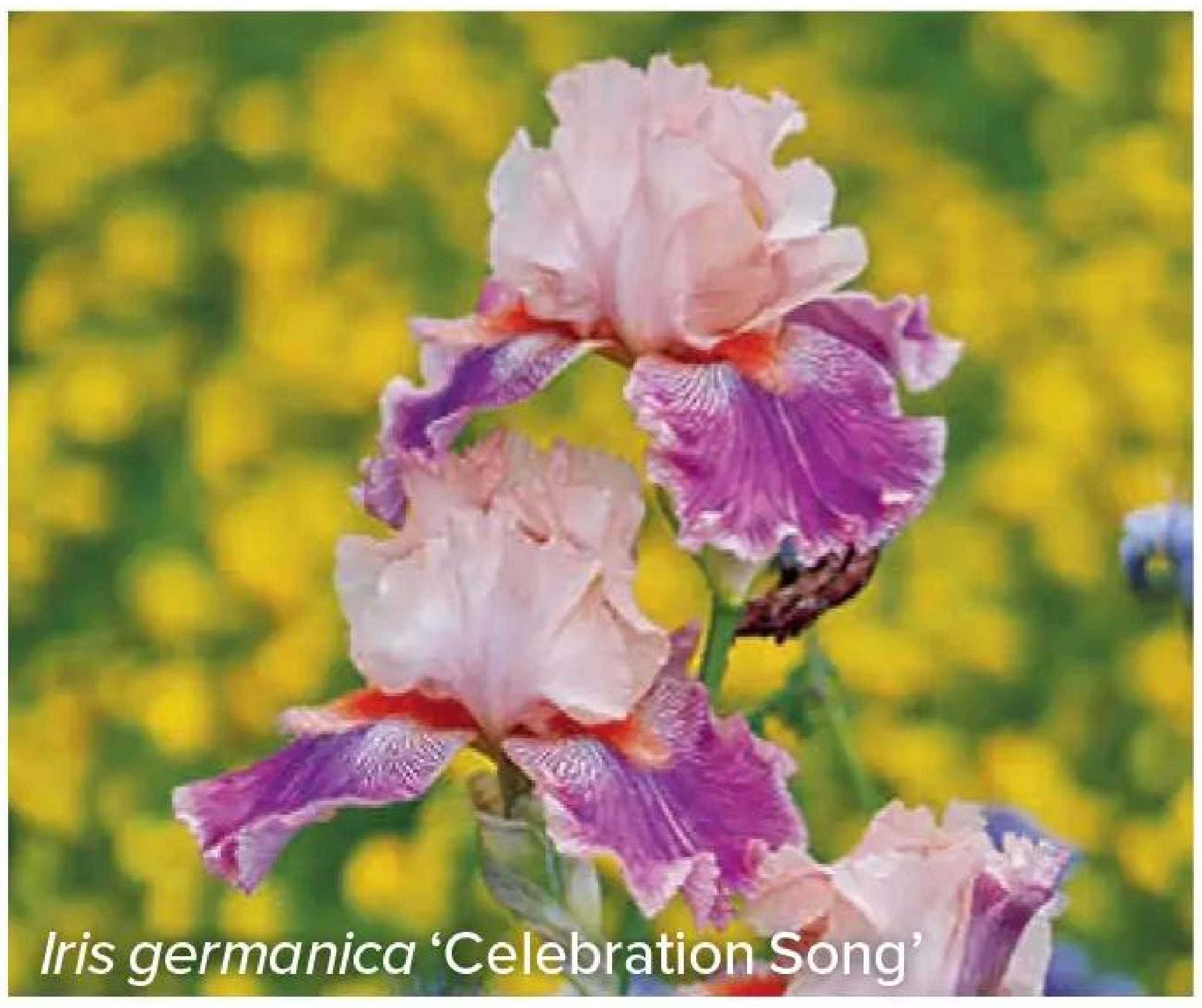
In the border, irises will rise above surrounding plants, with tall stems topped with showy flowers, some varieties of which are scented. Siberian irises, *Iris sibirica*, have smaller, more delicate flowers, with no beard, and they come in a more limited range of colours – white, yellow and shades of purple. The leaves are thinner and brighter green than those of *Iris germanica* and are decorative in their own right.

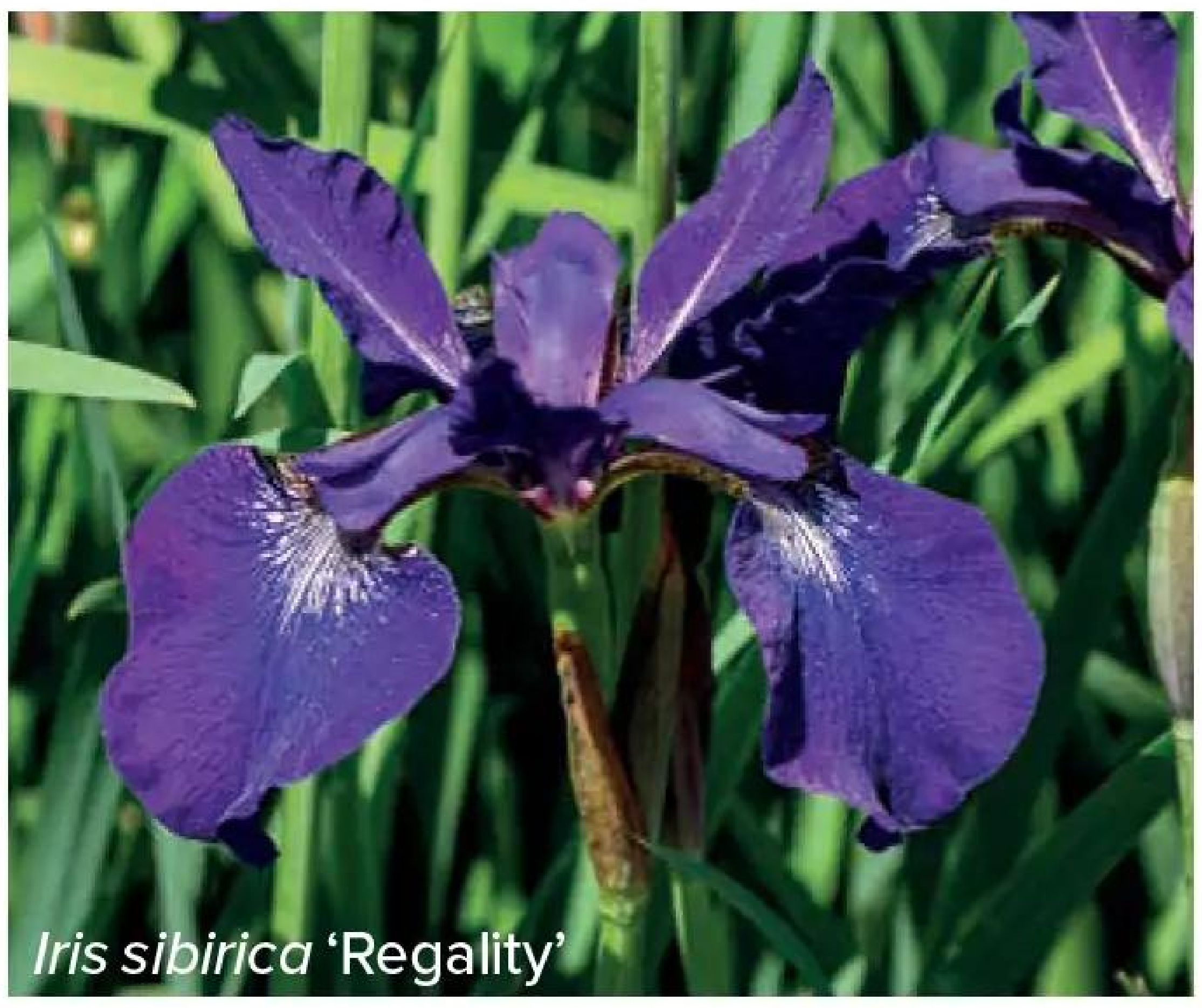
Iris germanica, the bearded iris, has thousands of cultivars, with colours ranging from white, yellow, pink, all the shades of purple/blue, to almost black. However, there is no true red , the closest being shades of orange, and deep burgundy. Different flower forms and patterns were also developed, and most are also scented. Bearded irises get their name from the line of little 'hairs', called beards, at the throat of each recurved petal. There are three main categories, with the shorter types flowering first in spring; middle-height cultivars next; and finally the taller kinds in June.

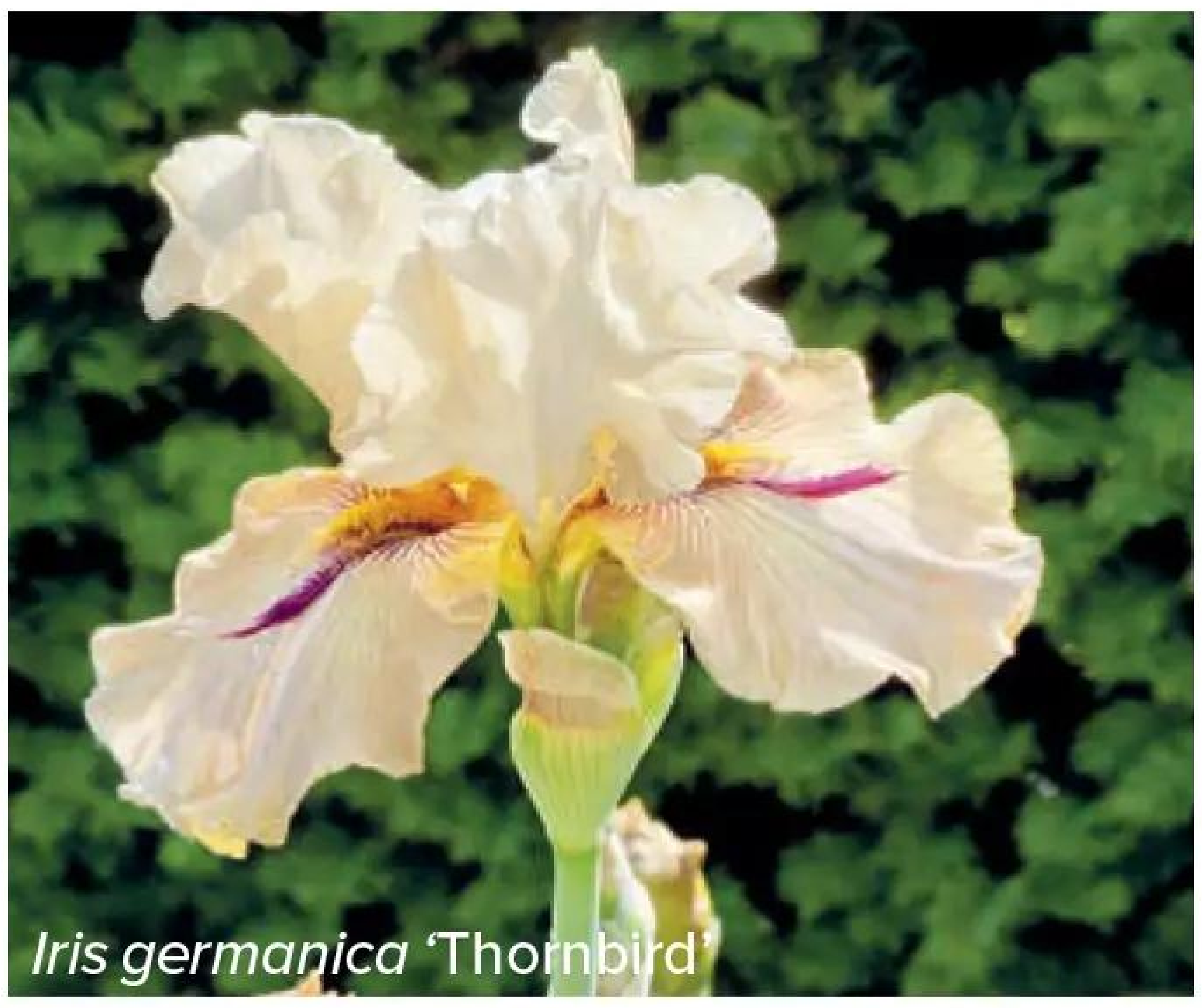
Top tips

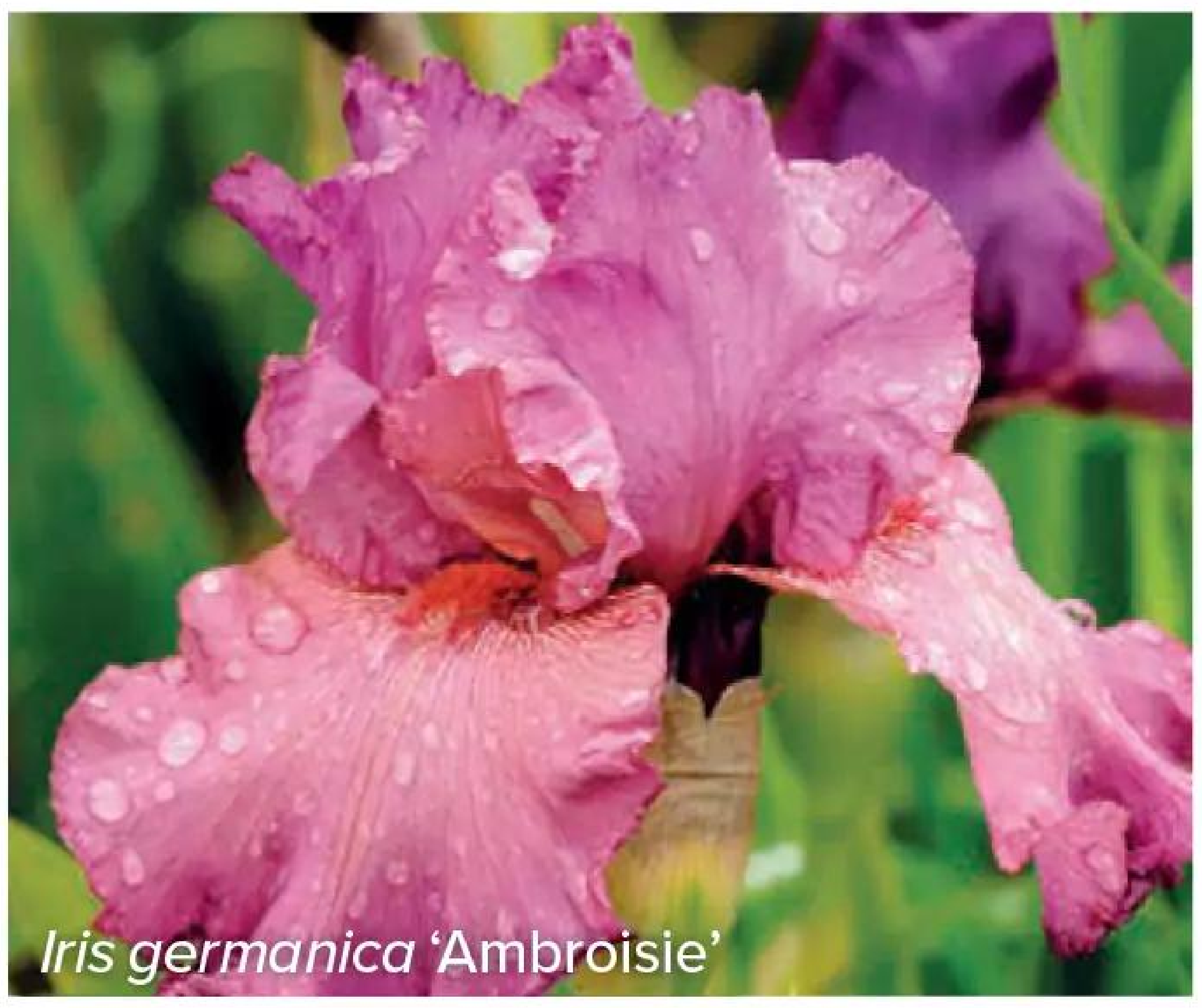
- Irises are toxic to humans and animals, and the sap can be a skin irritant
- Irises rarely need feeding in good soil. If needed, apply a light dressing of a low-nitrogen, high-potash and phosphate fertiliser after flowering
- Unlike bearded irises, *I. sibirica* should be planted 5cm below the soil

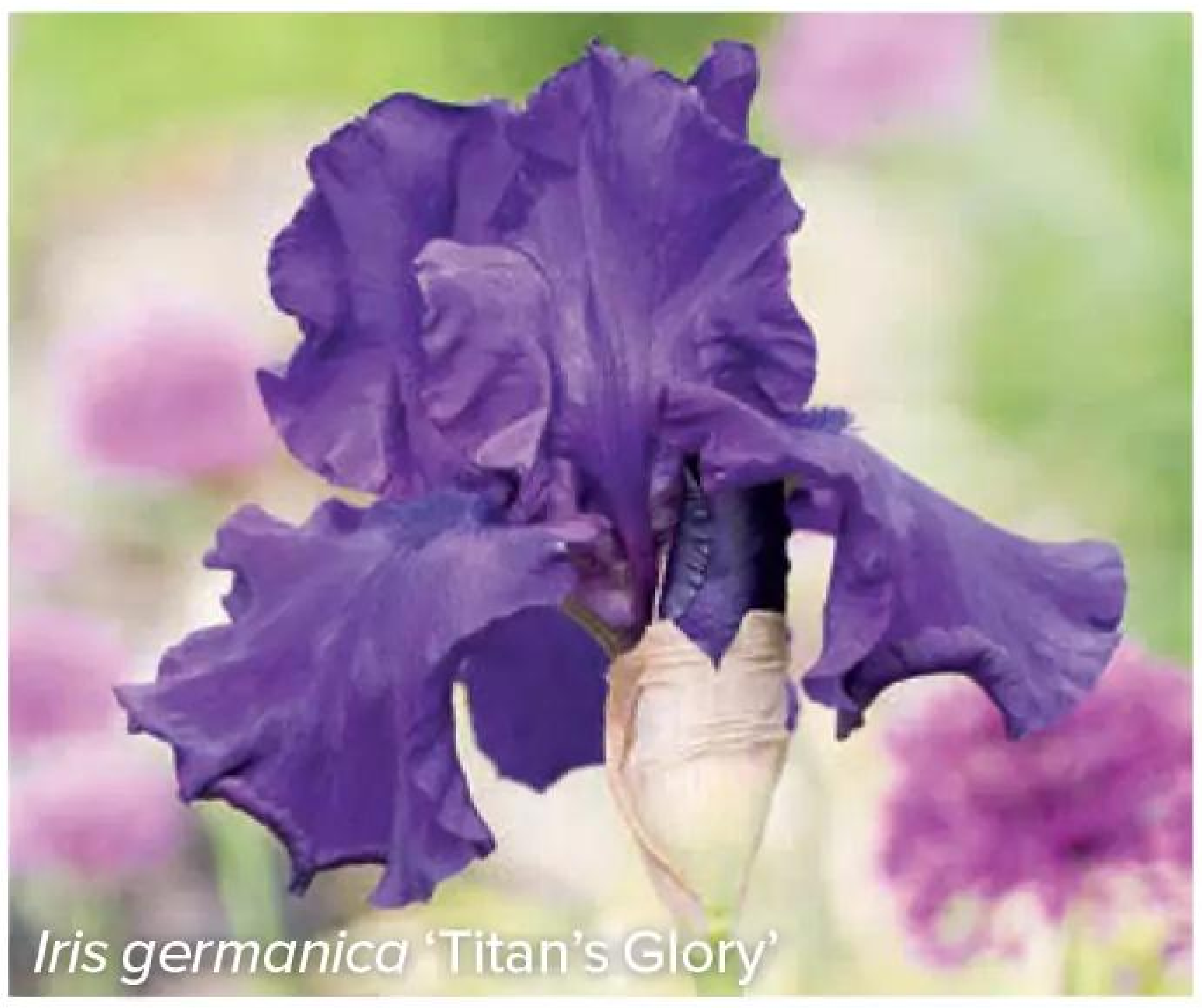
DIANA VIA ADOBE

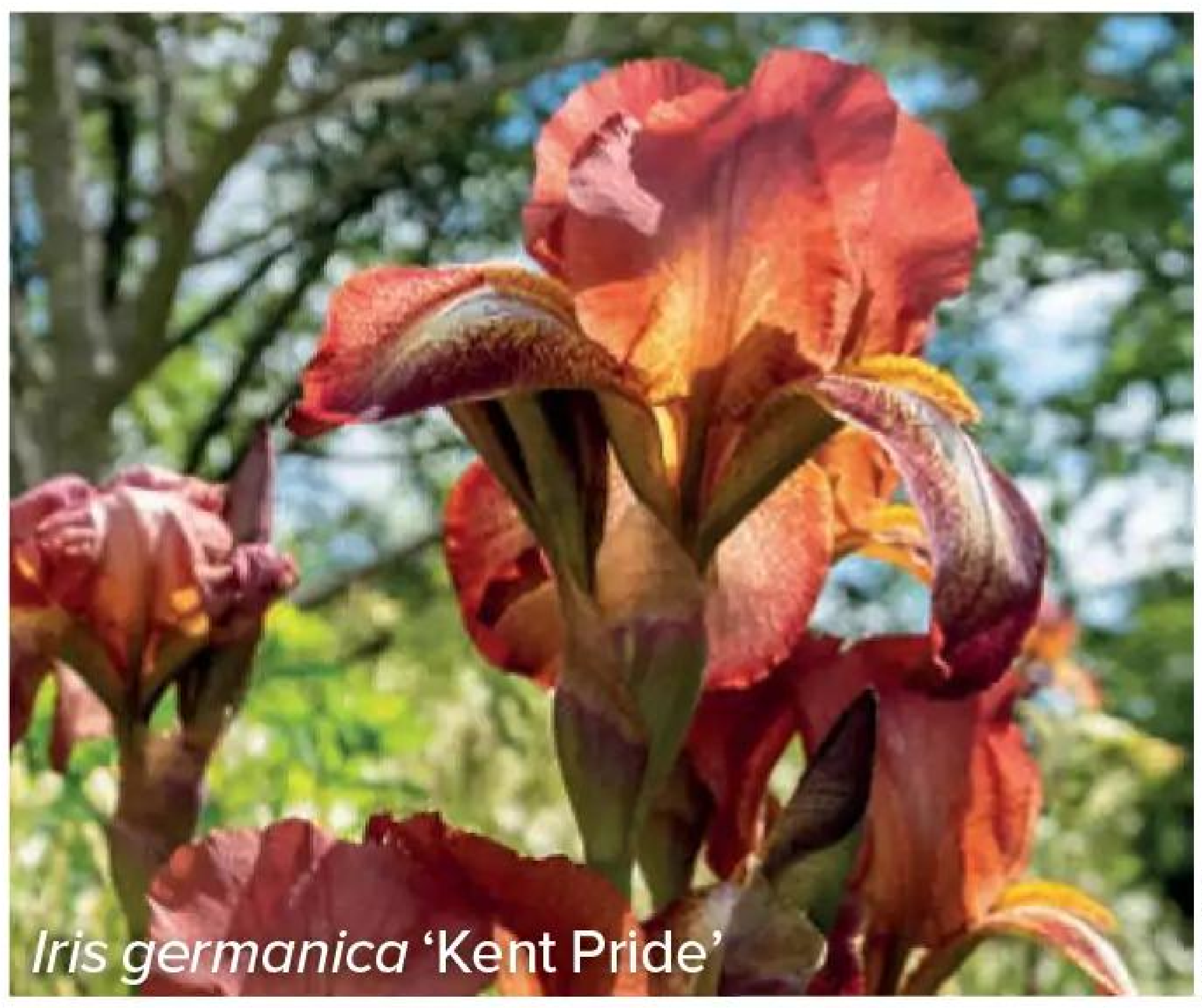

Iris germanica 'Celebration Song'


Iris sibirica 'Regality'


Iris germanica 'Thornbird'


Iris germanica 'Ambroisie'


Iris germanica 'Titan's Glory'


Iris germanica 'Kent Pride'

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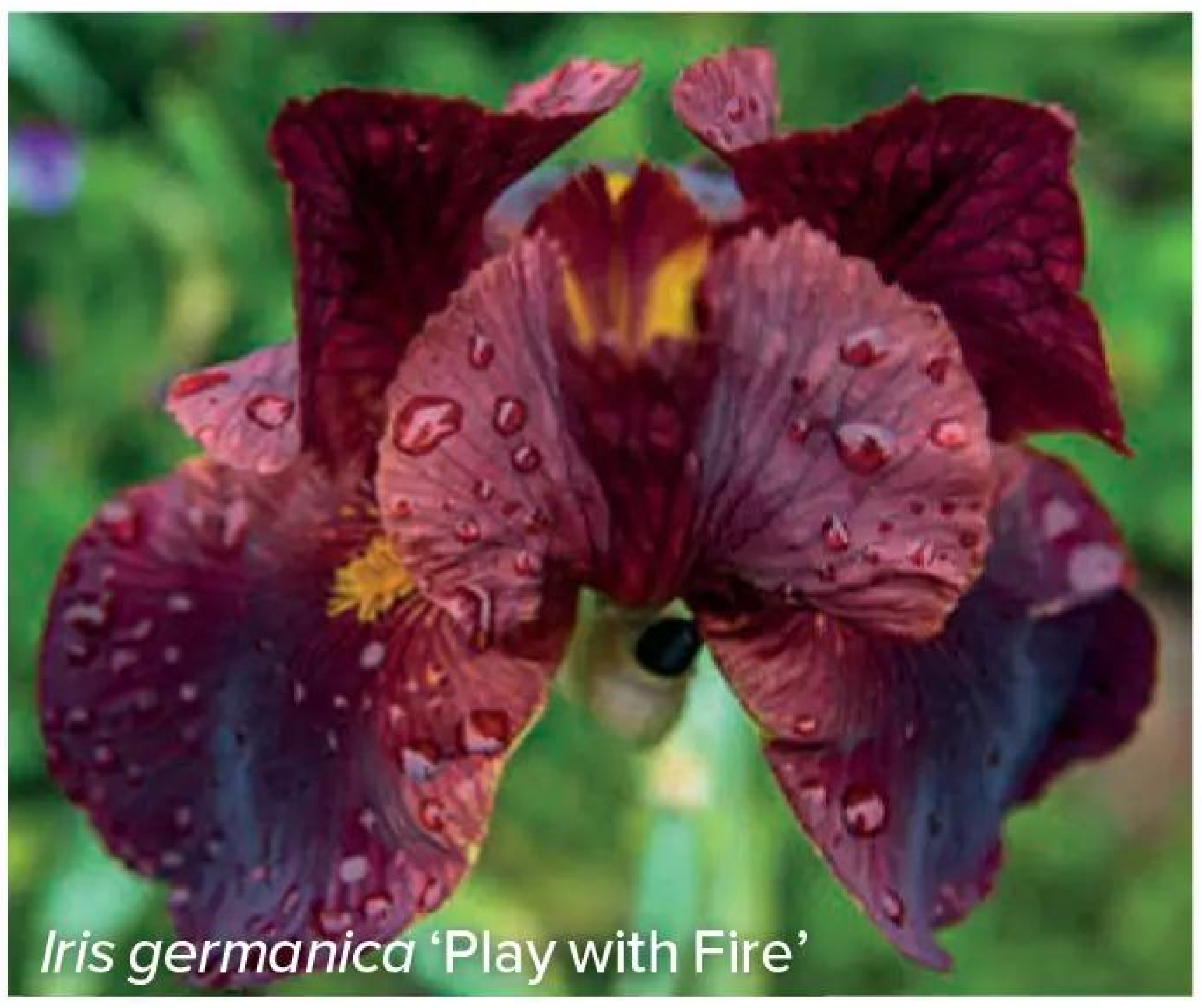
Iris germanica 'Play with Fire'

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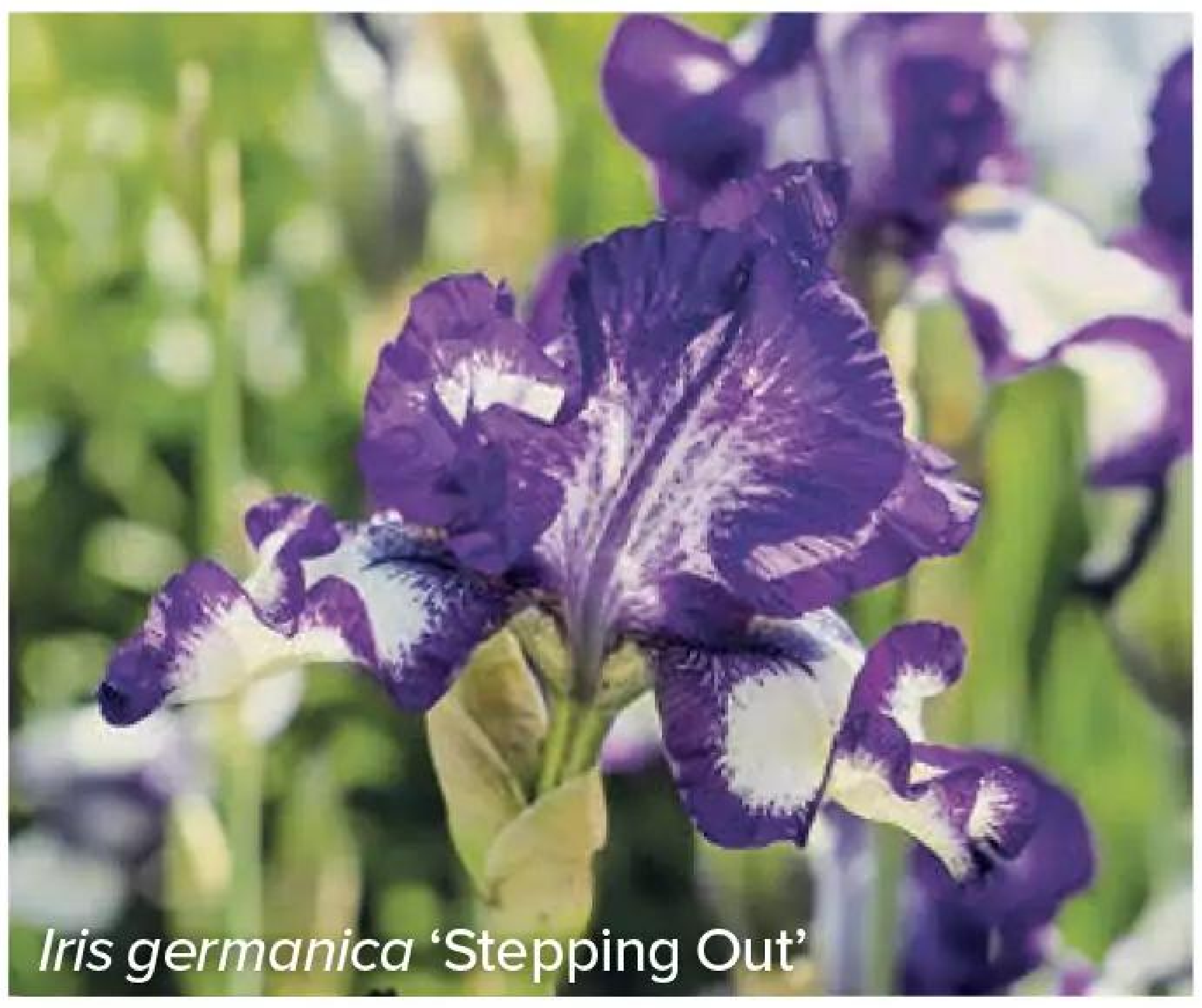
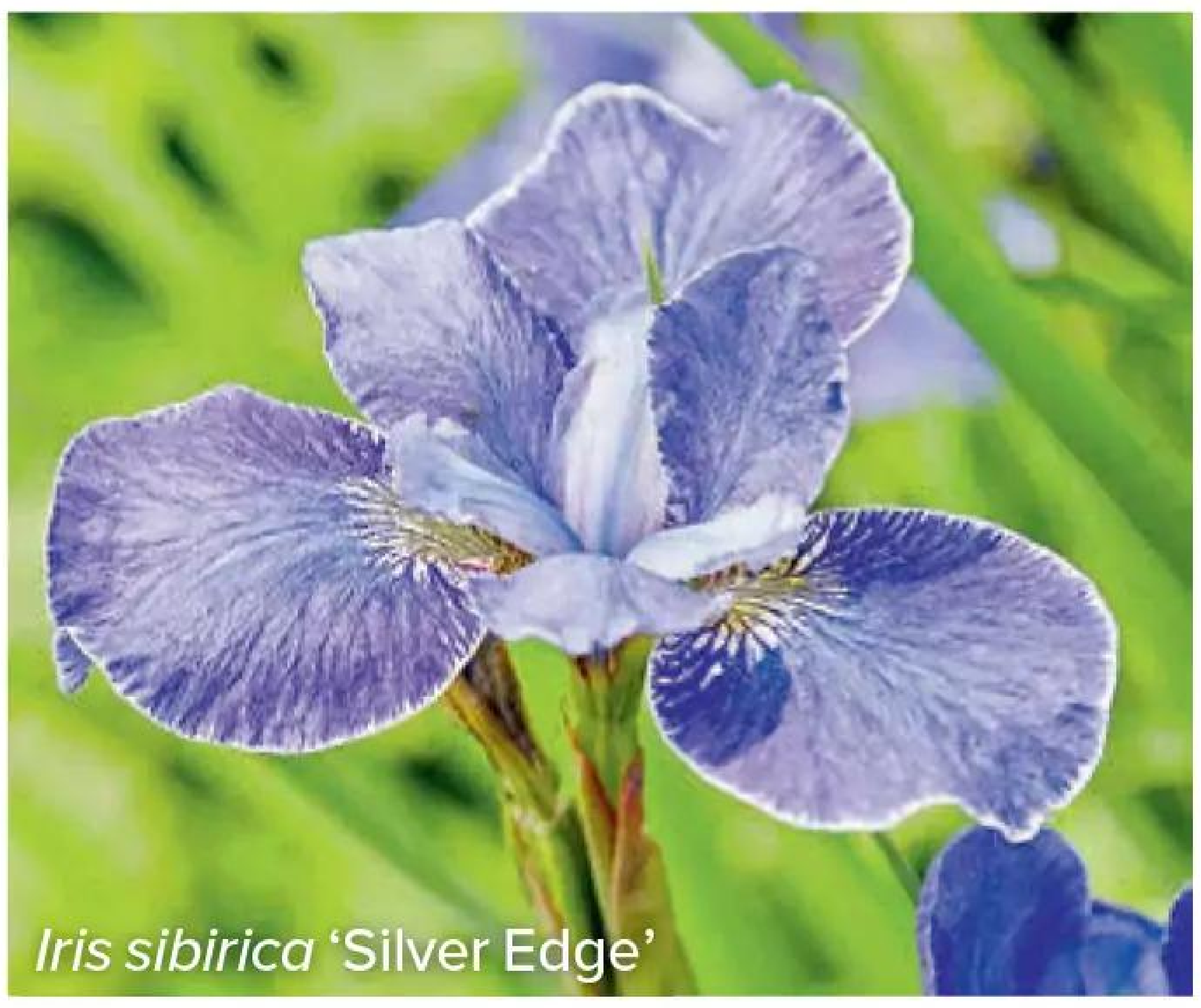

Iris germanica 'Stepping Out'


Iris sibirica 'Silver Edge'

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** Bearded irises need well-drained soil, with the rhizomes in full sun. *Iris Sibirica* will grow in moist, well-drained soil and tolerates partial shade.

✿ **Hardiness:** Very hardy! Irises will survive temperatures as low as -20C.

✿ **Planting:** Bearded irises should be spaced 30-40cm (12-15in) apart. The rhizomes like to be exposed, sitting on the surface with the roots securely anchored in the soil. If you're in an exposed location, pin the rhizome down to prevent 'wind rock' as the leaves appear.

To ensure they receive maximum light, plant rhizomes so they face the sun and keep them free of weeds to reduce shade. Water after planting, but once established they need very little – too much moisture can lead to rotting.

Siberian irises need to be planted under the soil (around 5cm deep), and prefer moist but well-drained soil. They don't mind partial shade.

✿ **Deadheading:** Cut spent flower stems down to the base.

✿ **End of season (Bearded iris):** Cut down old flower stems after flowering, and remove any dying foliage in autumn.

✿ **Propagation:** *Iris germanica* should be divided every 3-5 years, four weeks after flowering has finished. Siberian irises can be left for longer, being divided in early spring or after flowering when they become too congested.

Pests and diseases

The leaves are at risk from slugs, snails and thrips. Bearded irises may be susceptible to aphid-borne viruses, bacterial soft rot and grey moulds.

Alliums

Plant: autumn

Position: full sun / partial shade

Hardiness: -10 to -15°C

Propagate: bulb propagation after flowering

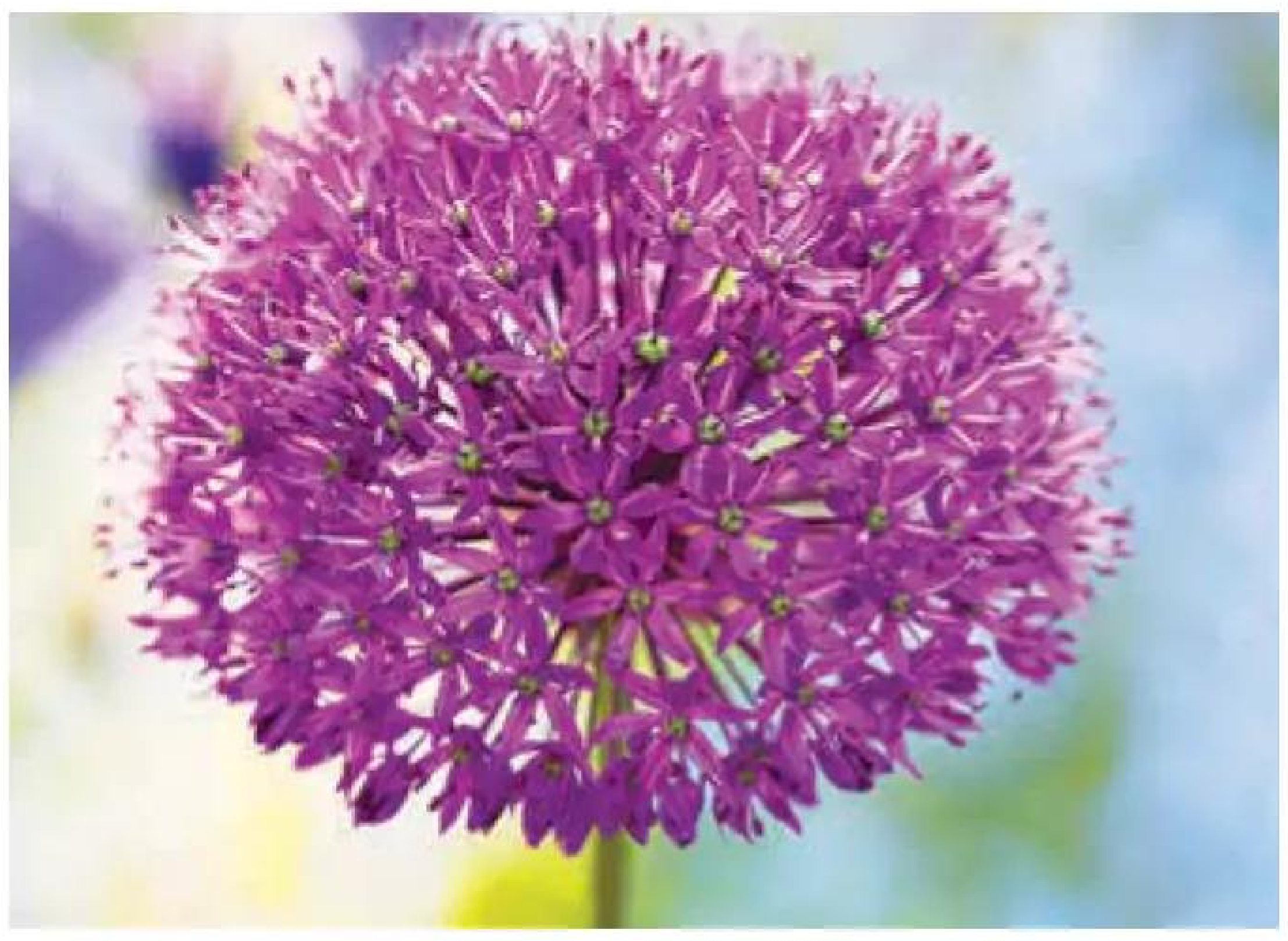
Fantastic drama, colour, form and texture

If you are thinking about bulbs that will flower in May and June, top of the list has to be alliums. No stylish early summer border is complete without those signature lollipop heads, bobbing above the first flush of seasonal flowers.

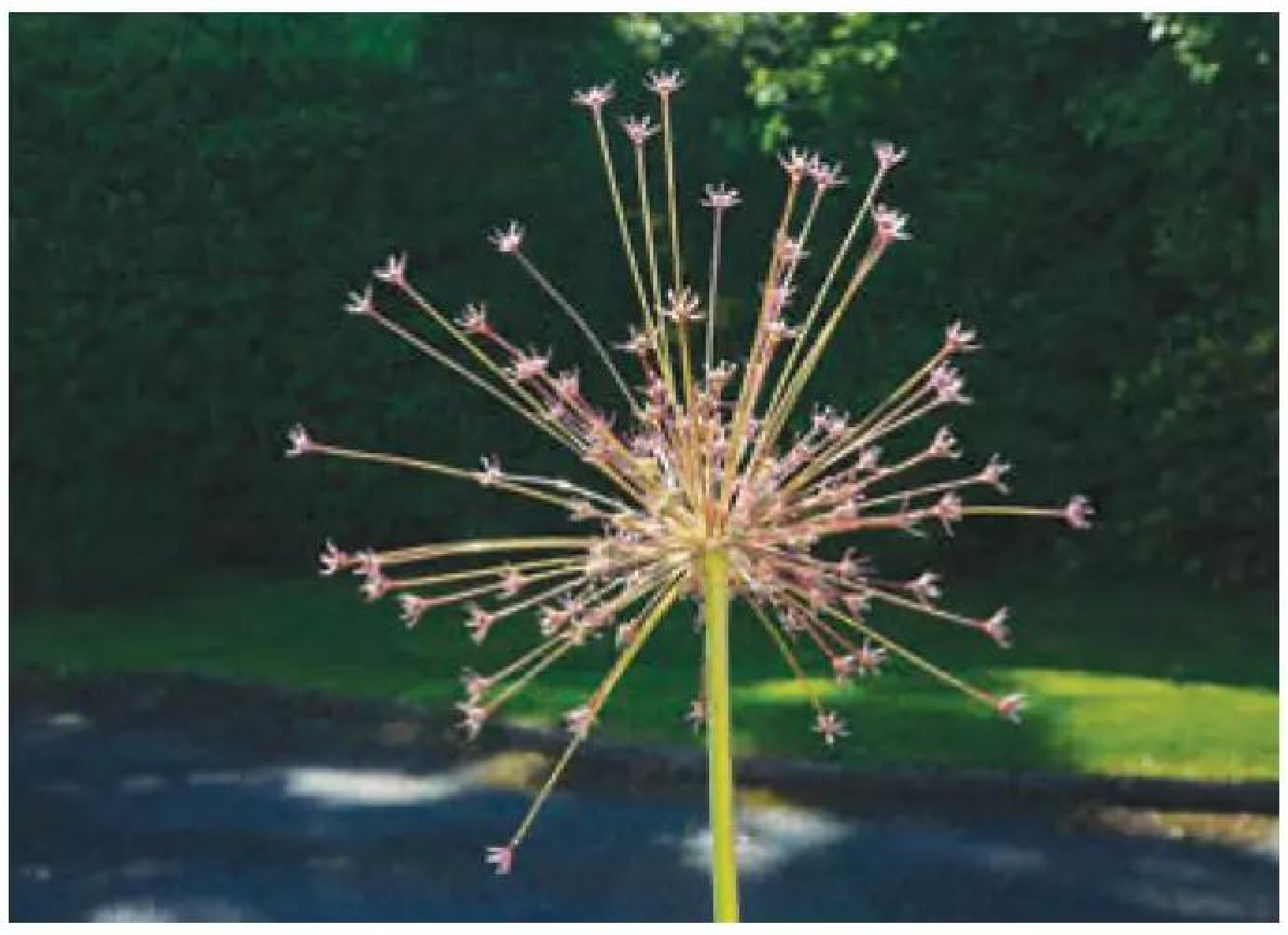
These glamorous blooms are actually part of the edible onion family, and it is only relatively recently that they have risen to such fashionable heights.

Over the past two decades, under the principle of growing 'the right plant in the right place', the importance of attracting wildlife and the desire for design ideas that go beyond the traditional cottage garden have all gained traction, and alliums have become a firm fixture in the ornamental border. With their long straight stems and fantastic pompom blooms, they are ideal for cutting, while pollinators love the multiple flowers that make up those spherical heads.

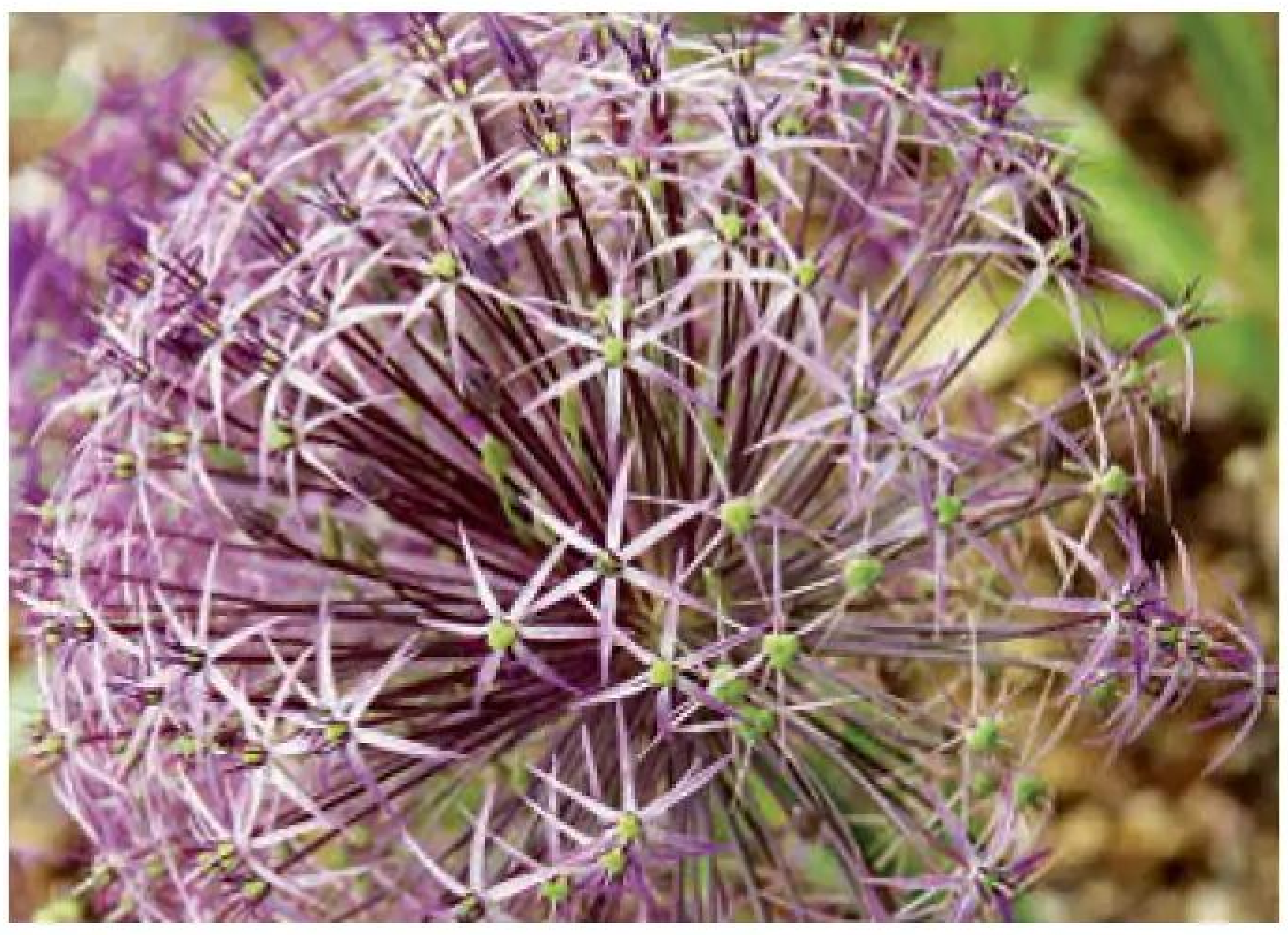
Most species alliums come from the Northern Hemisphere, which means they are well-suited to our climate, and are quite tough plants. Given the right conditions, alliums are easy to grow. The main requirements are sunshine and good drainage – partial shade can cause the stems to bend towards the light, although certain species alliums suit shadier situations. Perfect for drought-tolerant planting, many will naturalise over time.



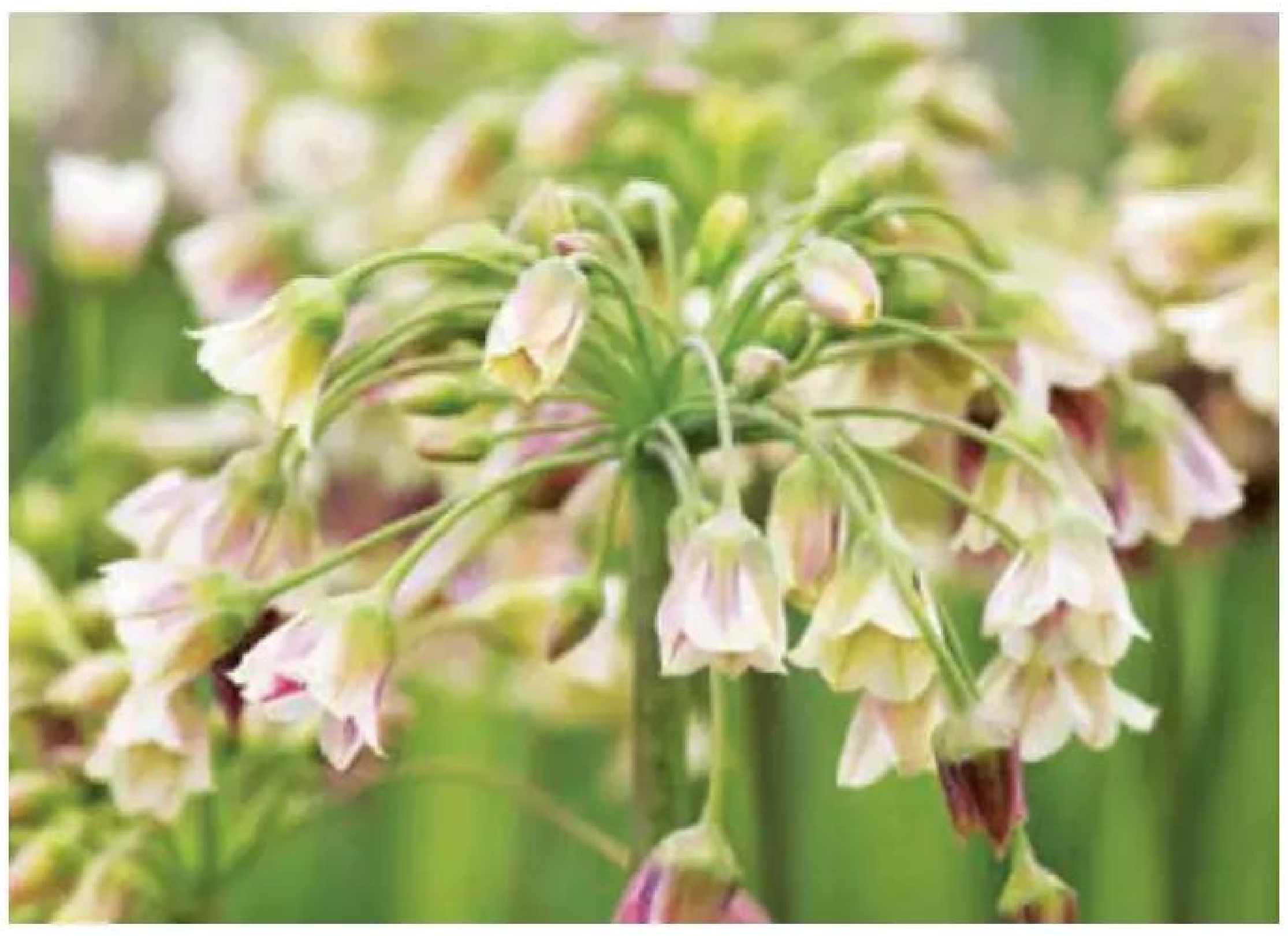
***A. hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation' AGM**
This has to be the quintessential allium; enduringly popular, it features symmetrical, round, brilliant-purple flowerheads on good, strong stems in May and June. **Height:** 3ft (90cm).



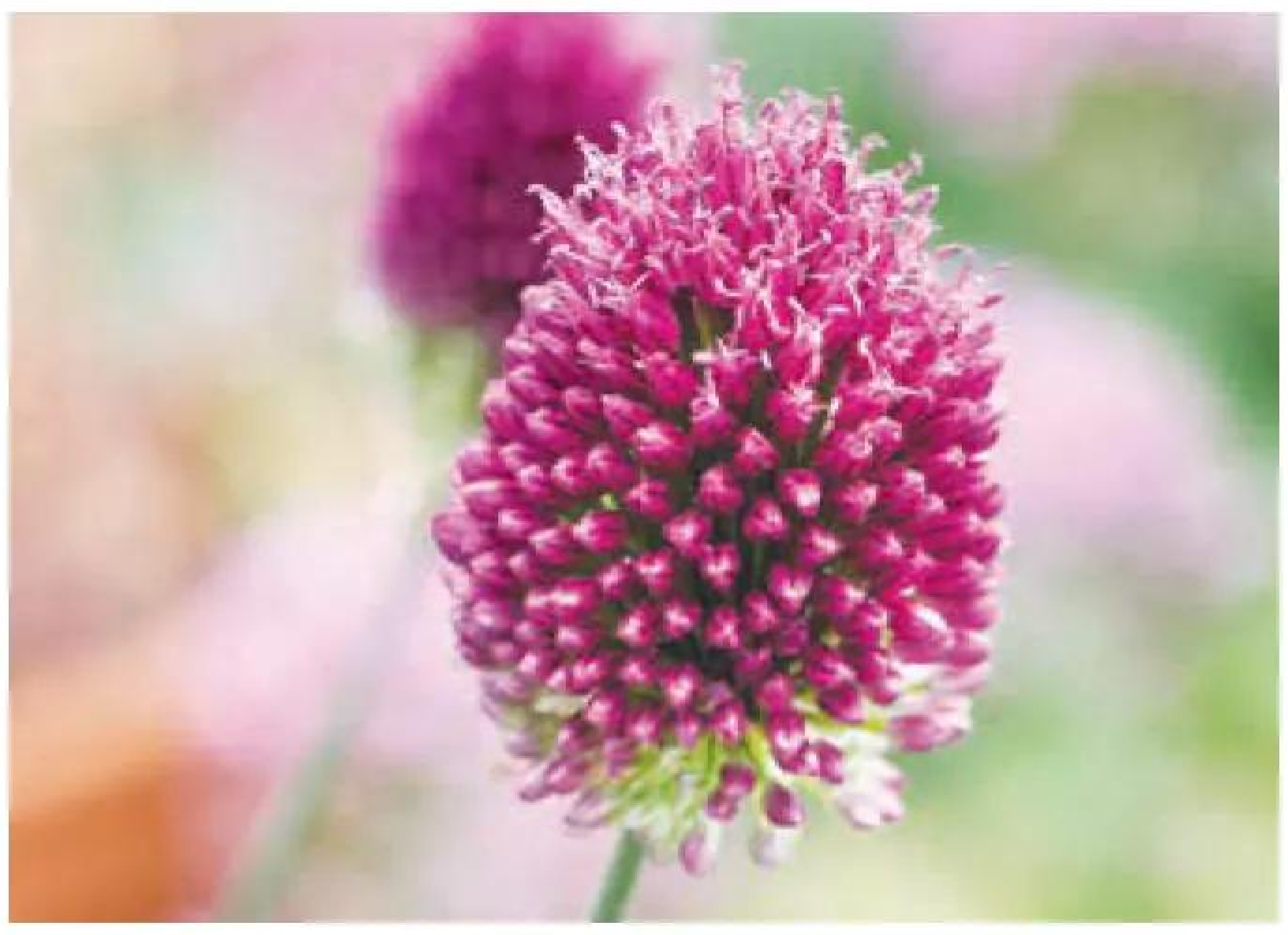
A. schubertii
Resembling dazzling fireworks, the flowerheads look just as spectacular when dried. Pale in colour, they have a strong silhouette that works well when planted singly through a border of perennials. **Height:** 1ft (30cm).



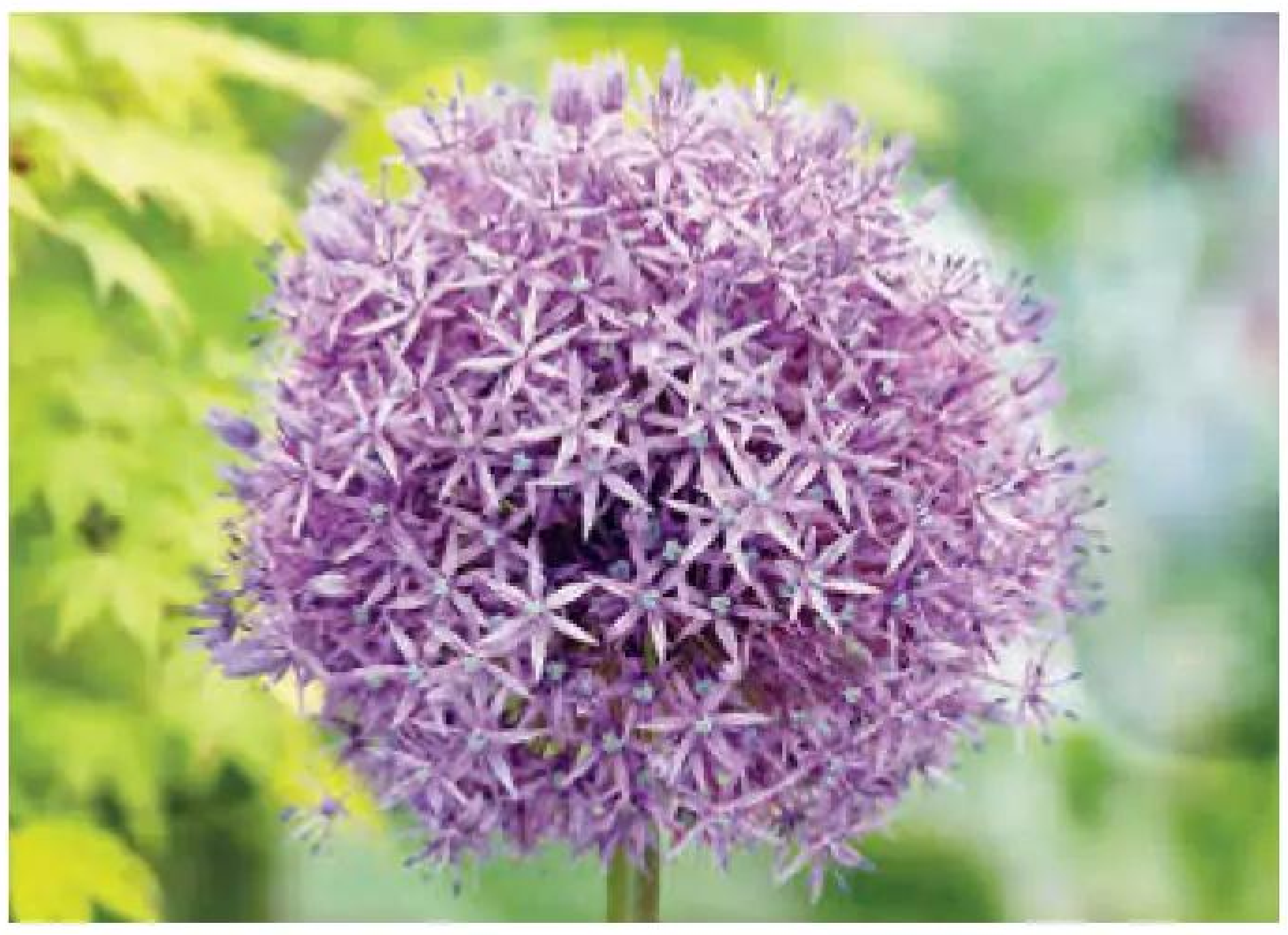
***A. cristophii* AGM**
With 8in (20cm) flowerheads composed of masses of starry blooms punctuated by brilliant-green centres, this is a real showstopper. Shorter than 'Purple Sensation', its June flowers are a more subtle shade of rose-violet. **Height:** 1ft (30cm).



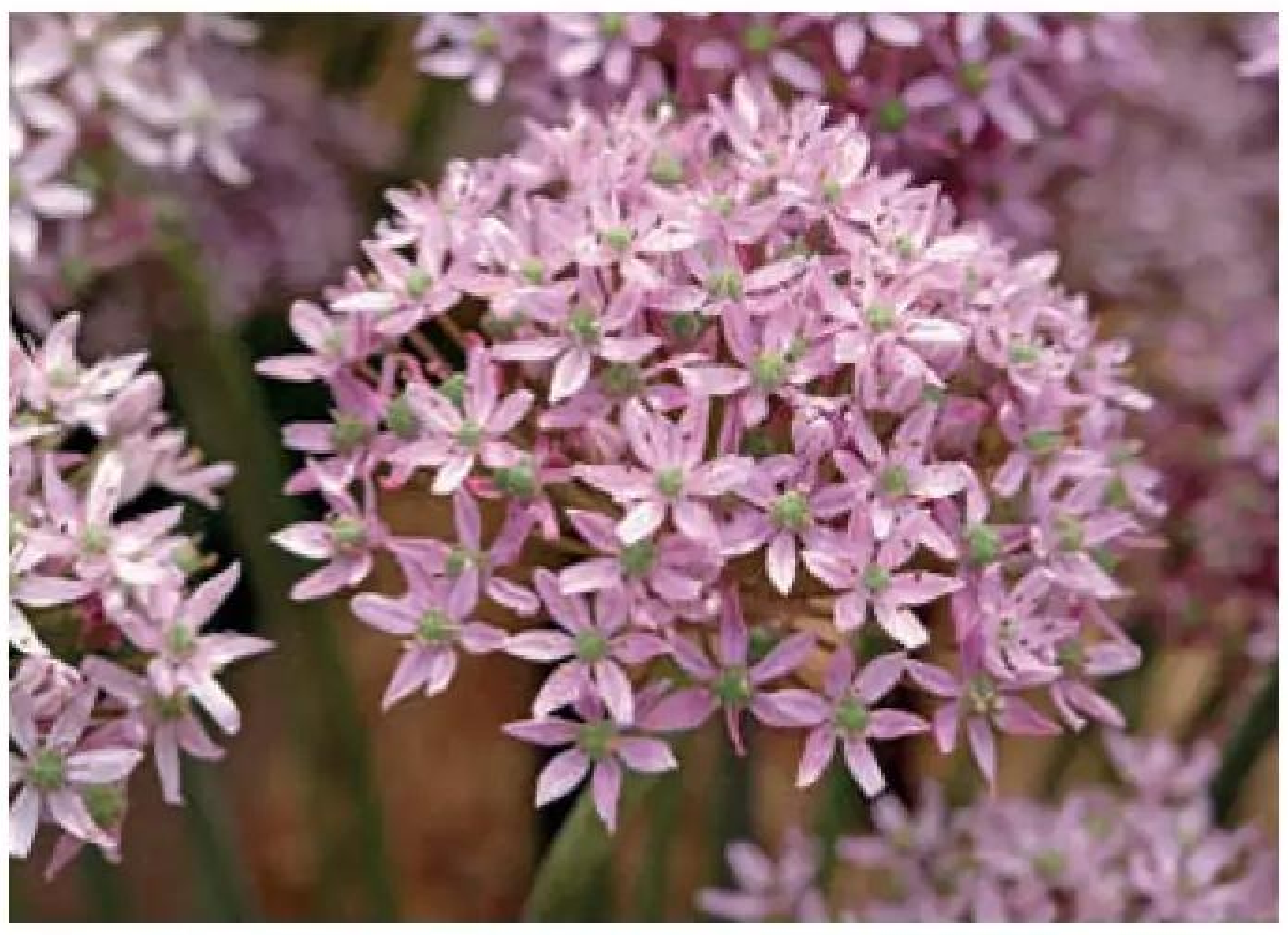
Nectaroscordum siculum* subsp. *bulgaricum
Sometimes sold as *A. bulgaricum*, this less showy species has heads of bell-shapedflowers – cream with green and purple markings – on long, straight stems. Suits a shady spot. **Height:** 4ft (1.2m).



***A. sphaerocephalon* AGM**
Fast becoming a must-have for less formal and prairie-style planting schemes, the oval-shaped burgundy flowerheads are a lot smaller than those of other alliums, and appear later in the season (Jul-Aug). **Height:** 2ft (60cm).

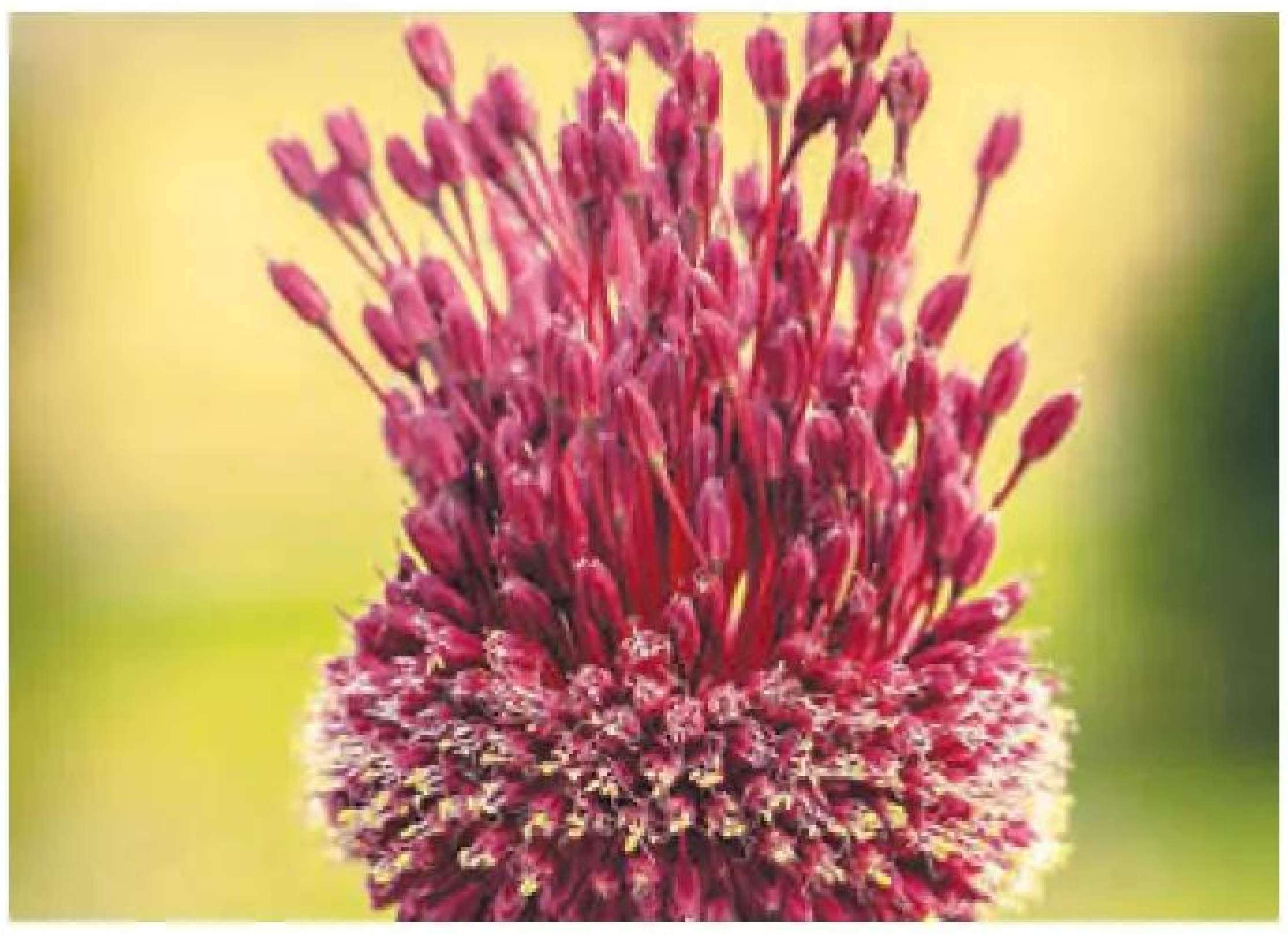


'Globemaster' AGM
Big on impact courtesy of large, longlasting flowerheads, which come in an attractive shade of violet-purple. A great performer – even the leaves are a bit tidier than those of most other alliums. **Height:** 39in (1m).

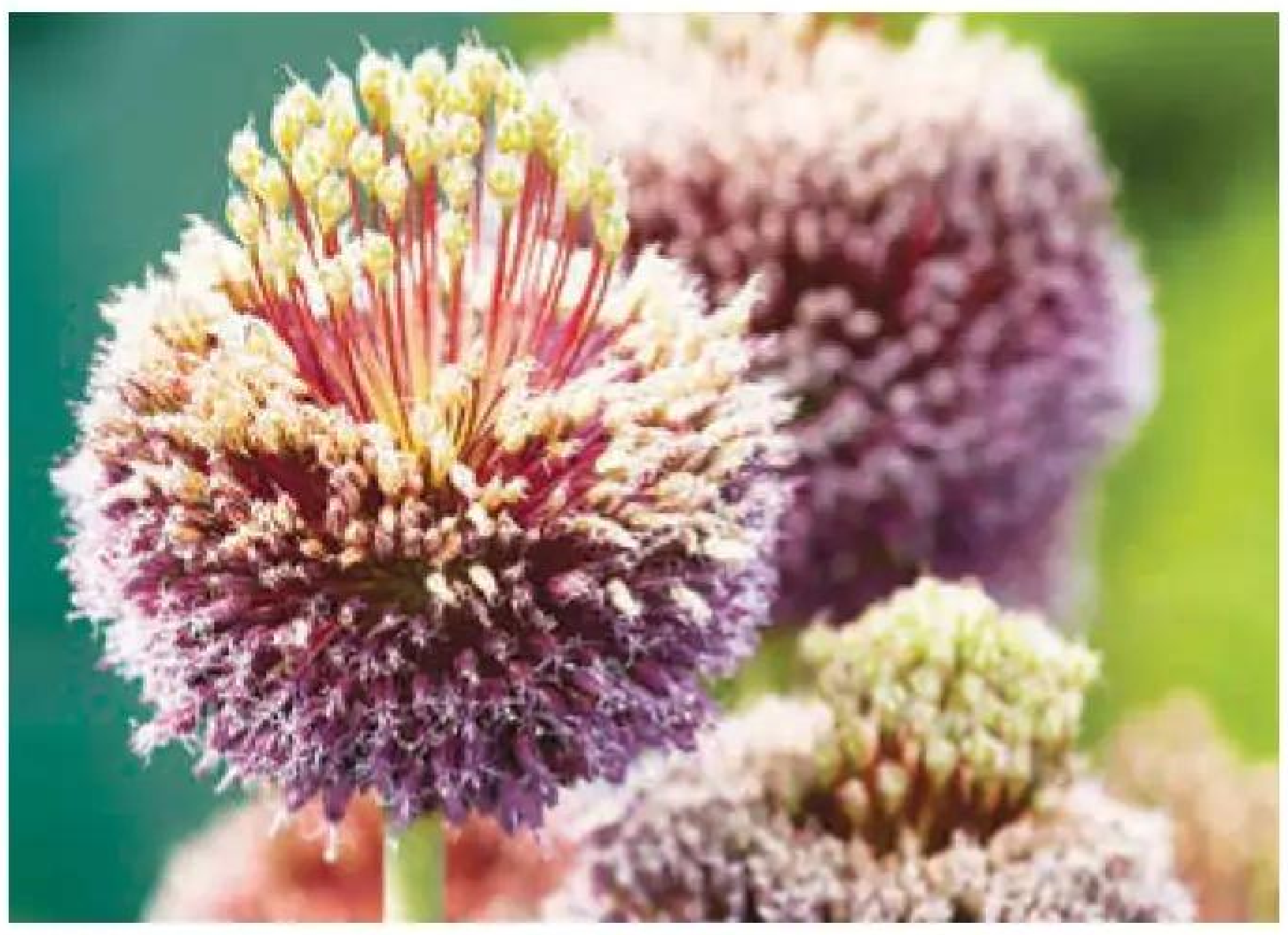


SHUTTERSTOCK

***A. nigrum* 'Pink Jewel'**
Pale-pink starry heads with dark, greenish centres appear on tall stems in June. They look particularly good planted in a container as a single display, with some low-growing foliage at the base. **Height:** 3ft (90cm).

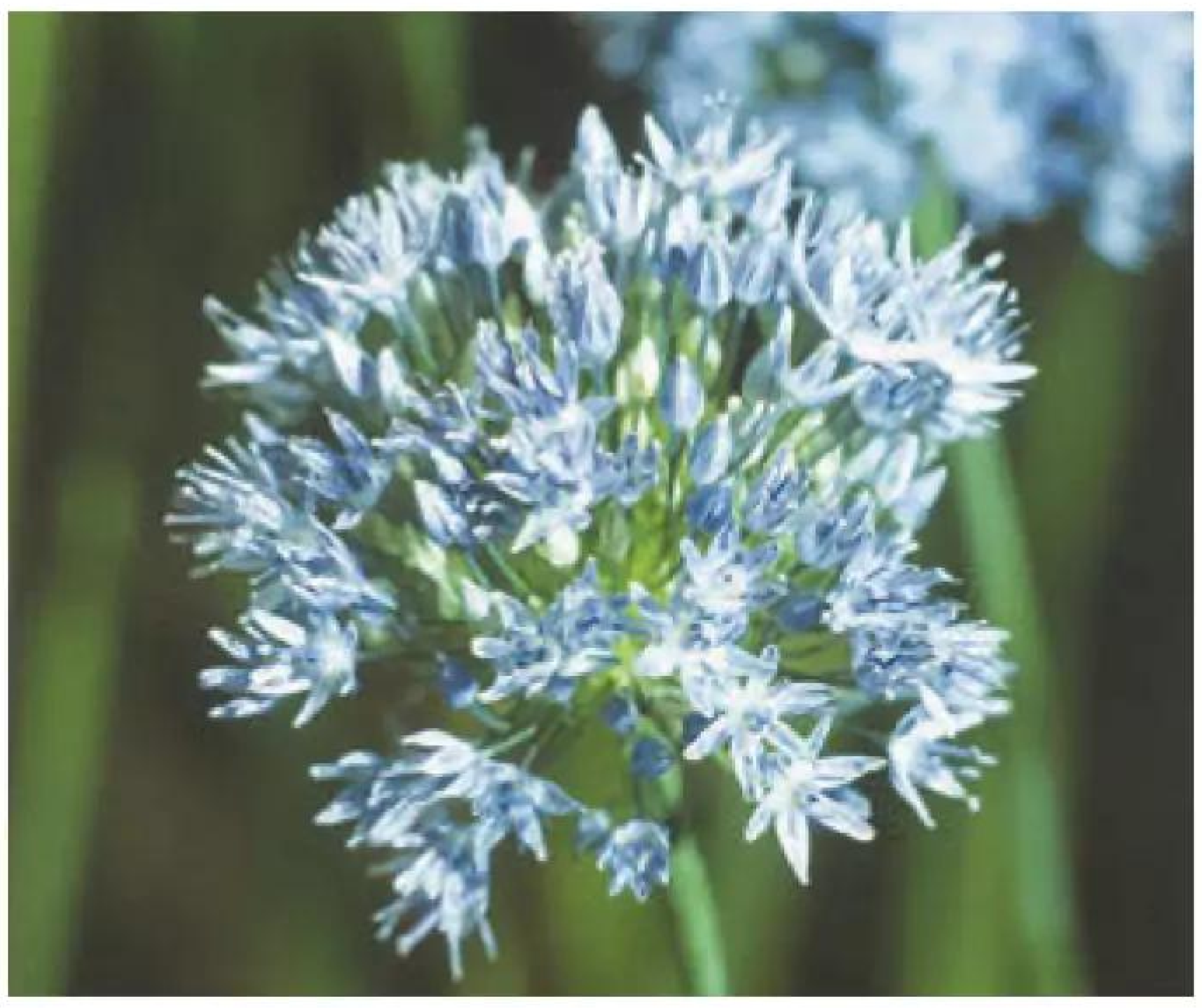


***A. amethystinum* 'Red Mohican'**
Easy to grow yet very striking. Strong, straight stems support quirky spiky-haired flowerheads that are maroon but tipped with contrasting white florets. An excellent candidate for cutting. **Height:** 39in (1m).



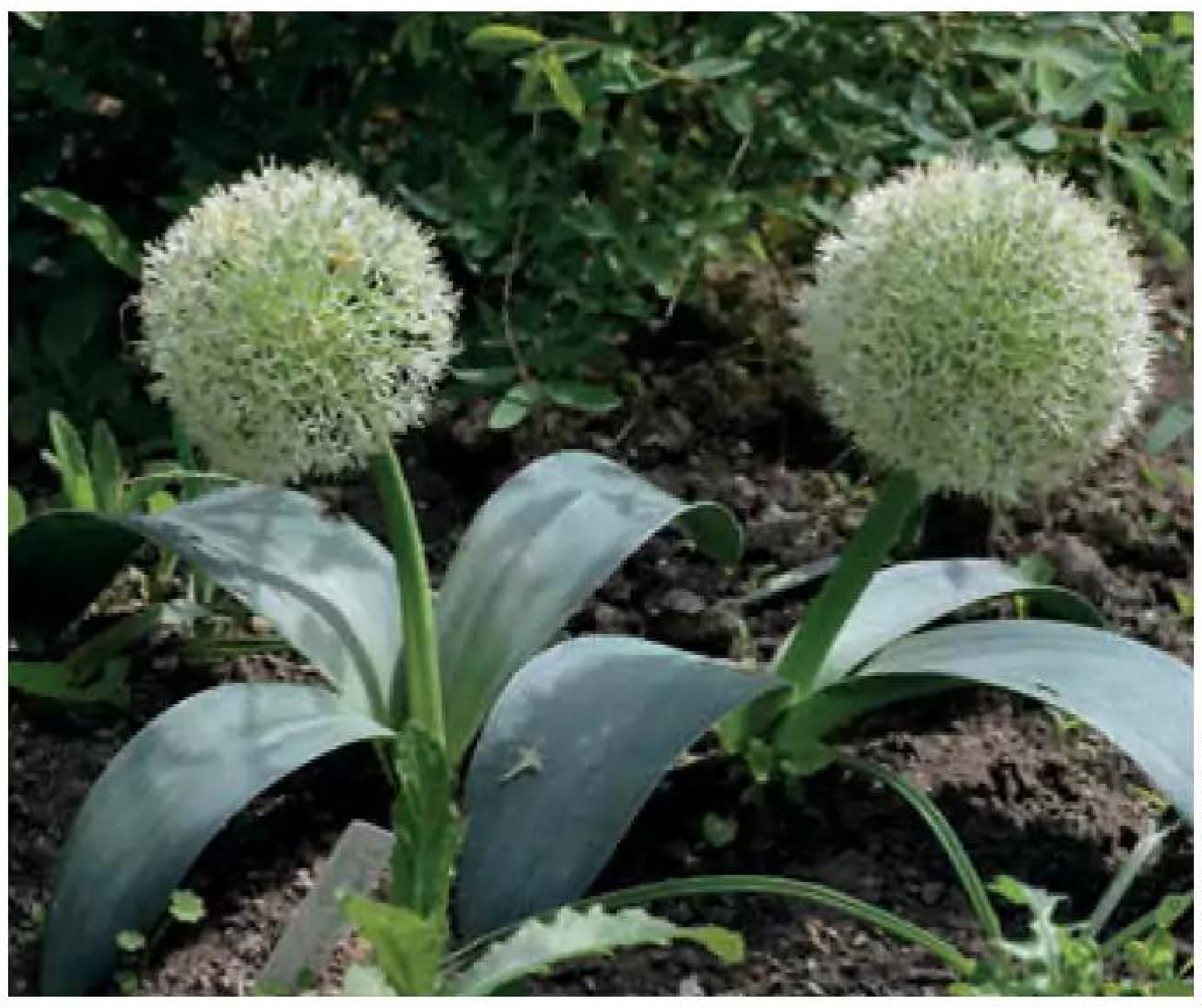
'Forelock'
Rather like a taller, bolder version of *A. spaerocephalon*, 'Forelock' has tufted dark-purple flowers that are quite distinctive. Works well planted in larger numbers, drifting through grasses or other perennials. **Height:** 39in (1m).

4 ALLIUMS WITH A TWIST



A. caeruleum

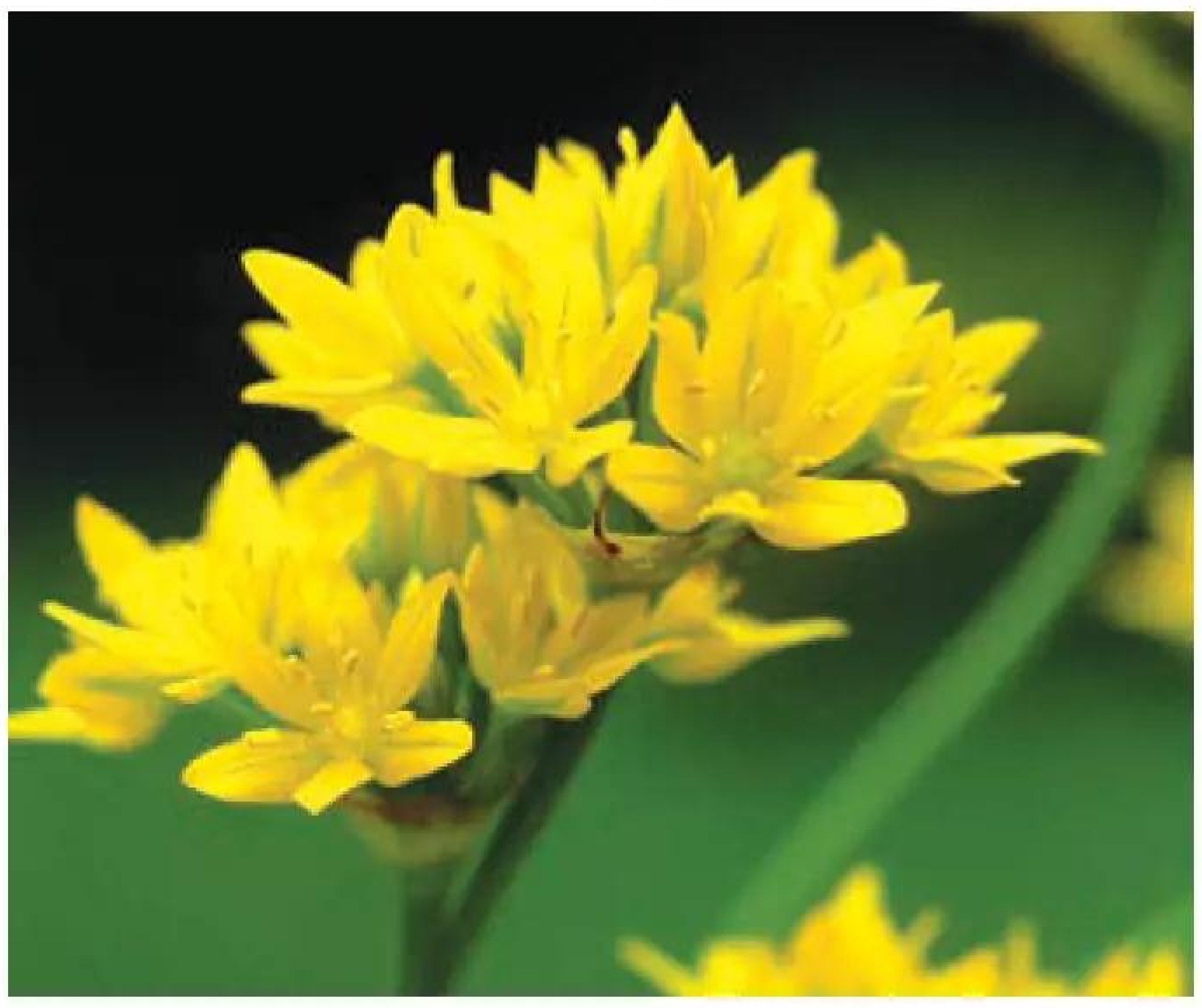
A small species allium that blooms in June, this is the only one with flowerheads that are true blue. **Height:** Not too tall at 1½ft (45cm), it looks particularly lovely when planted in gravel among low-growing alpines and sedums.



SHUTTERSTOCK

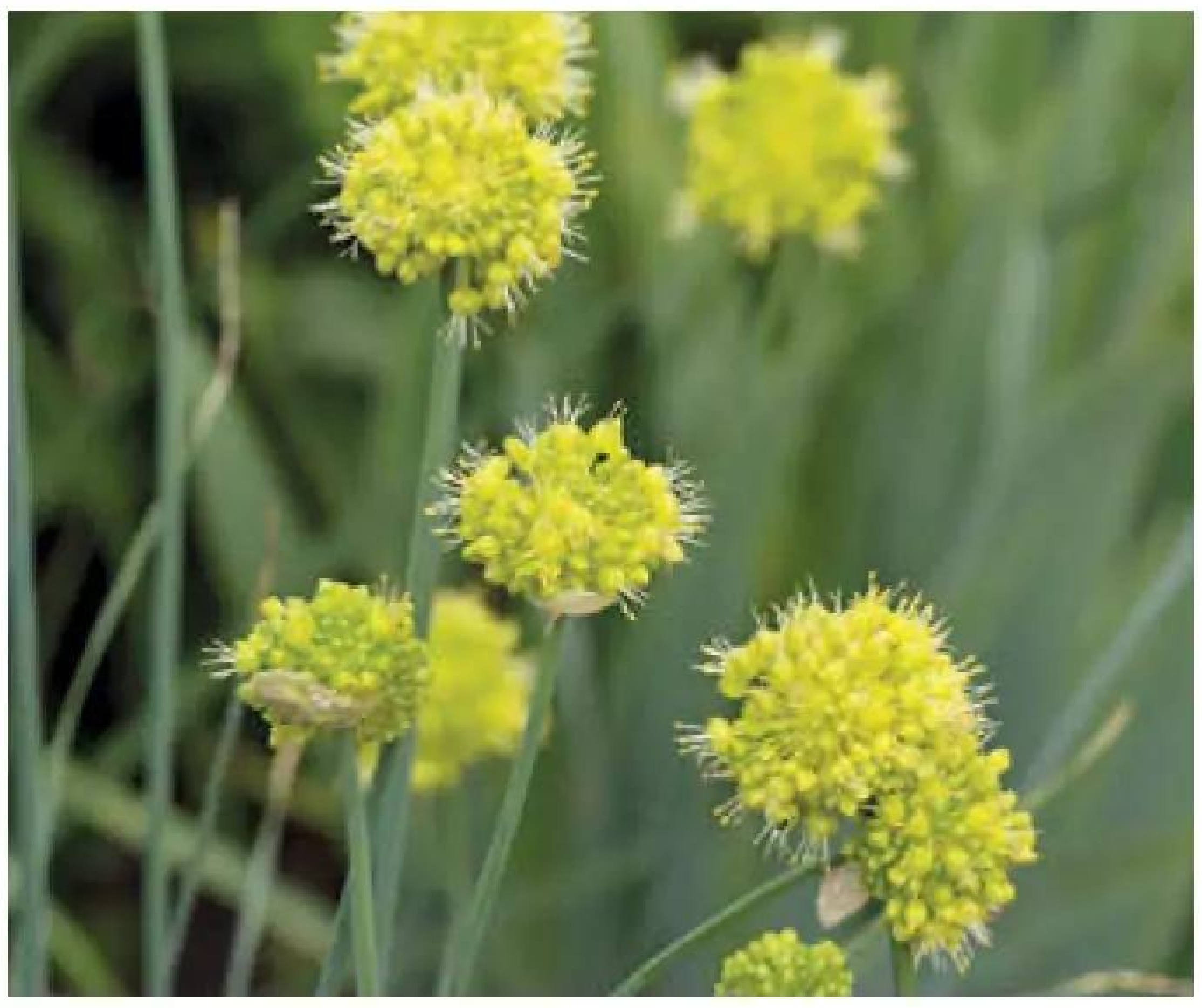
A. karataviense 'Ivory Queen'

This short stemmed allium combines good, broad leaves with substantial globe-shaped flowerheads in a greenish-white. Try planting at the front of a border, or in a container on a sunny patio. **Height:** 10in (25cm).



A. moly

It's easy to see why *A. moly* is also know as golden-flowered garlic. Rich-yellow and long-lasting, the flowerheads are a hit with butterflies, and plants will cope with some shade. For slightly bigger blooms, look for 'Jeannine'. **Height:** 10in (25cm).



A. obliquum

This Siberian species is a good choice for heavier soils, and has decent year-round foliage. The zingy-green flowers appear in June and will happily set seed, making it excellent for naturalising. **Height:** 2ft (60cm).

Great for drying

Whether left in situ (if you don't mind them self-seeding) or cut for dried flower arrangements, the flowerheads of alliums continue to earn their keep long after they have faded. And they don't just come in purple. In fact, the classic long-stemmed purple globes are only part of the story. At just 10in (25cm) tall, pinkish-white *A. karataviense* works well at the front of a border. There are also pure-white varieties, plus rarer pink, blue and yellow types. Current trends favour the smaller flowerheads of *A. sphaerocephalon* and looser, more open alliums such as *A. neapolitanum*, *A. cernuum* and *A. hyalinum*.

GROWING ADVICE

- **Position:** With alliums, the key to success is good drainage. Choose a sunny spot, and if you have heavy soil you'll need to add extra grit when planting, or plant in a pot. Plant twice as deep as the size of the bulb and one bulb's width apart. Never grow ornamental alliums near your best edible shallots as doing so will promote the spread of common problems such as rust – a fungal disease that can affect all members of the onion family.
- **Care:** Foliage tends to look tatty; if you can't disguise it, trim it back after flowering.
- **Planting:** Plant a grid of taller, large-flowering alliums in formal beds edged with low box hedges for a sculptural effect.
- **Plant with:** Weave drifts of smallerheaded alliums such as *A. sphaerocephalon* through mixed prairie-style borders, with grasses and perennials.

Use medium-height bulbs in containers and windowboxes, letting them grow up and through smaller-flowering plants that spill over the sides.

Plant shade-tolerant alliums alongside ferns and other foliage plants.

A. sphaerocephalon looks great with grasses

Pests & diseases

As part of the onion family, expect the same sort of issues with leaf miners and onion fly. Manage by covering with fine mesh to prevent access.

Onion downy mildew can occur if there's a lack of airflow and damp surroundings. Lift and dispose of affected bulbs.

Tobacco

Nicotiana

Plant: after last frost

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: -5°C for perennials

Propagate: sow seeds March-May

Great for adding for long-lasting summer colour and scent

Nicotianas are the perfect plants for mixing and matching in borders and containers; versatile and beautiful, great for filling gaps and providing colour and scent. They bring contrast, with flowers ranging in shades of elegant whites and greens to brilliant pinks, purples and crimson, and also add texture, both subtle and bold – with airy stems and delicate flowers or larger leaved varieties. And of course, there is the lovely jasmine-like fragrance in the evenings.

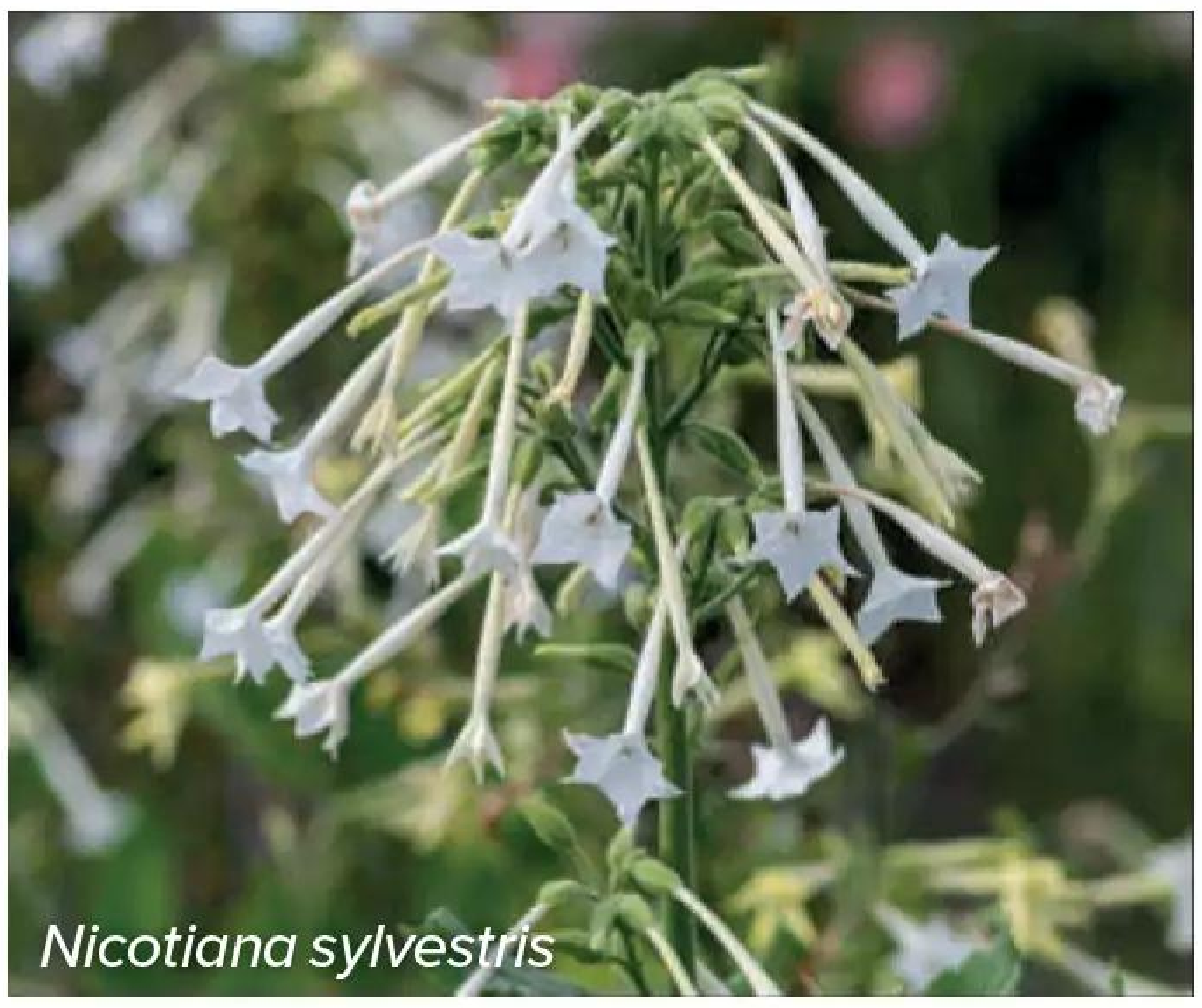
The nicotianas we are most familiar with are ornamental tobacco plants. It's thought there are as many as 75 species nicotiana and these mostly share similar leaf and flower characteristics, although some, such as *N. glauca*, are more shrubby and some of the few Australian species have slightly fleshier leaves.

The species nicotianas are easy to grow and there are also many hybrid cultivars, largely bred from *N. affinis*, that offer a compact habit and more intense colours.

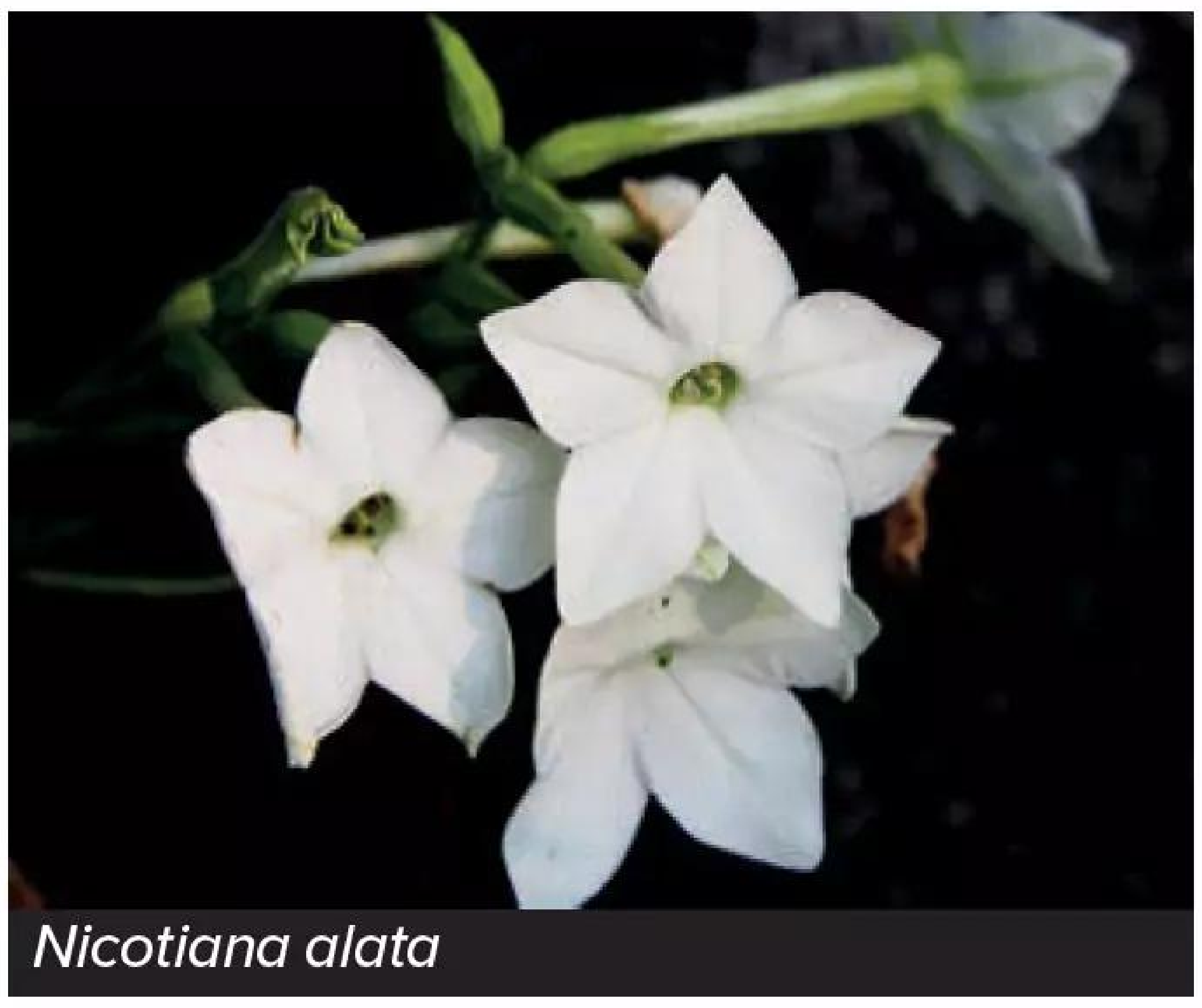
A noticeable characterisitic of tobacco plants, is their 'stickiness'. This is due to specialised hair-like structures on the plant's surface called trichomes, which secrete a sticky resin as a defence mechanism. One of the compenents is nicotine, which is a natural insecticide.

Did you know...

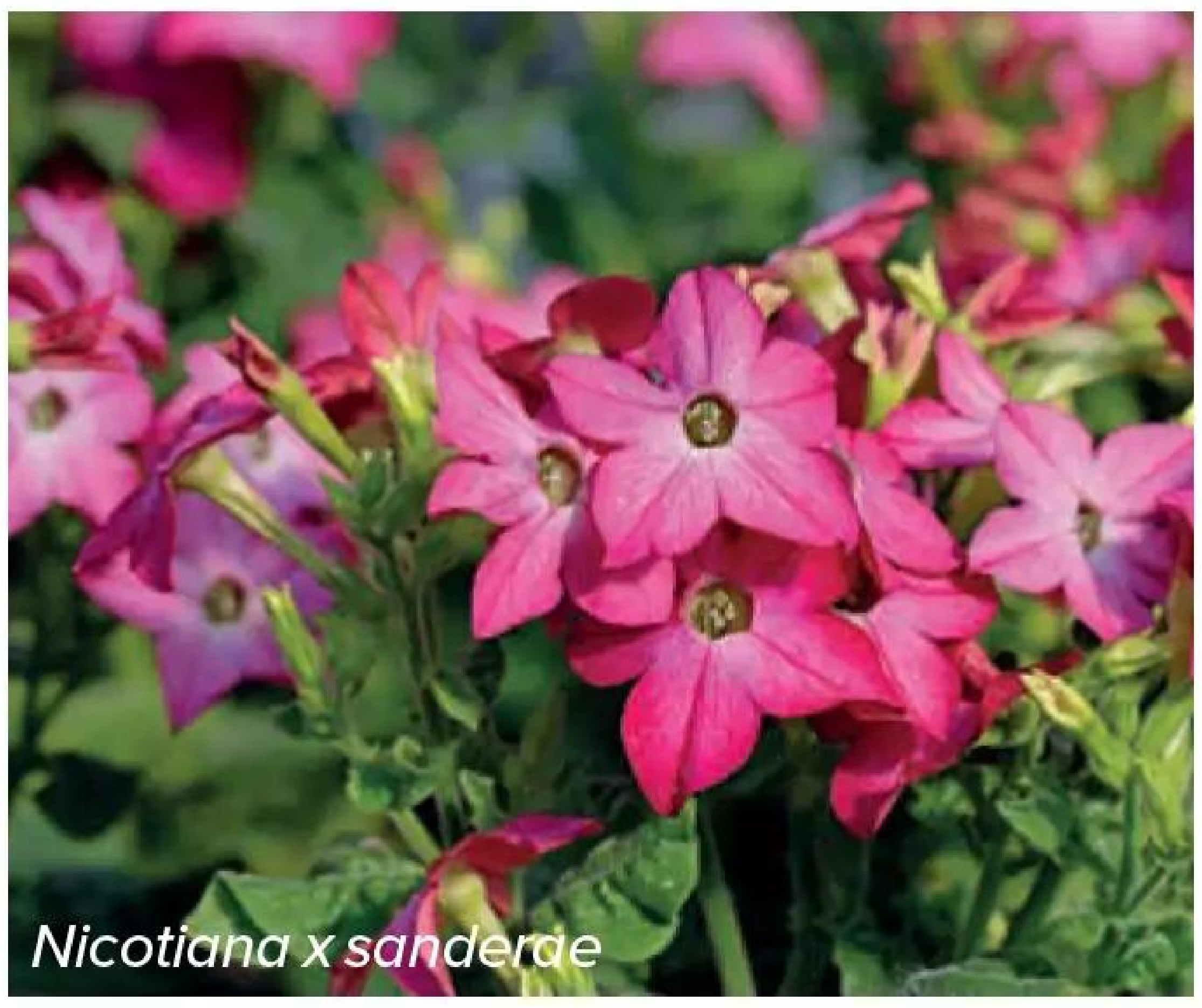
Nicotania tabacum is the smoking tobacco plant, but it can be grown purely for its good looks, reaching heights of up to 6ft (2m) with a profusion of pink flowers



Nicotiana sylvestris



Nicotiana alata



Nicotiana x sanderae

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GROWING ADVICE

Sow the very fine seeds in drills directly onto the surface of a tray of compost. Cover with a thin layer of vermiculite and use a heated propagator as they really benefit from some bottom heat to help germination; water from below so as not to disperse them. Once the seedlings have produced their second set of leaves, they can be transplanted.

Pests & diseases

- Look out for aphids, slugs, snails, red spider mites (in dry, warm conditions, such as in greenhouses or during hot summers). Use biological controls.
- Tobacco mosaic virus (TMV) – remove and destroy any plants showing signs of virus infection immediately.
- Powdery/downy mildew, and Botrytis can occur in damp conditions. Ensure good air circulation around plants.

Cone flower

Echinacea

Plant: spring/ summer

Position: full sun

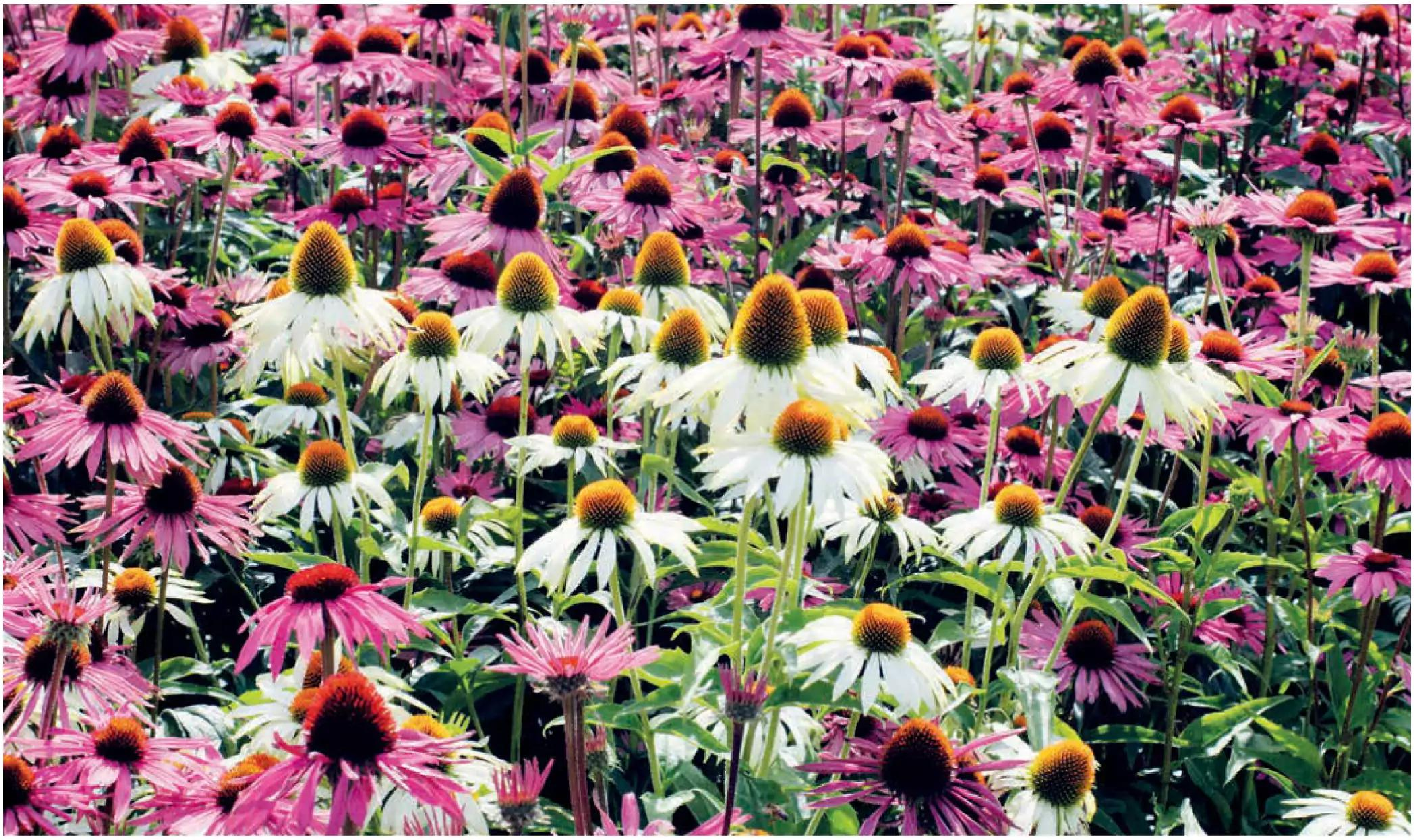
Hardiness: -10°C to -15°C

Propagate: division/ cuttings/seed

Echinaceas have become a key plant in summer borders over the past few decades

These plants originate in the open country of the central and Eastern USA, and when grown in drifts, among summer-flowering perennials and ornamental grasses, they are a signature plant of the prairie planting style. Prairie-style planting is inspired by these landscapes where perennial flowers grow across large areas, alongside grasses, often in quite harsh conditions. This look has been translated into more domestic settings by the godfather of the 'new perennial' prairie gardening style, Dutch designer Piet Oudolf. Echinaceas have grown in popularity as his free-flowing planting schemes have been developed in many public and private landscapes.

In the home garden, echinaceas add vibrant summer colours to borders, from classic burnt oranges and pinks right through to new cultivars in bold reds with a few, rarer pale whites and greens. With a long flowering season and good winter silhouettes, they sustain interest well beyond the summer into the winter. They also



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS ALAMY UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

Top tips

- Remove spent flowers to encourage continued blooming
- Cut stems to about 4 inches in late autumn or early spring
- Leave some seed heads for winter interest and bird food

offer interest for wildlife, with the large central seedhead attracting birds and pollinators. They don't need staking, and they make a good low-maintenance, drought-tolerant choice.

With medicinal properties too, echinaceas have played an important part in herbal medicine, nurtured by north American indigenous peoples. Today, the immune-boosting properties of echinacea tinctures have been embraced worldwide.

Proven track record

Have you previously tried and failed with echinaceas, finding that they were short-lived? Newer varieties have a proven track record and work better in the home garden, and new vibrant coloured cultivars like *E.* 'Tomato Soup' and *E.* 'Green Envy' are very popular.

The typical planting partners for echinaceas are grasses and other late-flowering summer perennials. Plant them in drifts so they can float above and between the contrasting colours and textures of plants such as echinops, eryngium, canna and leucanthemums.

Don't forget...

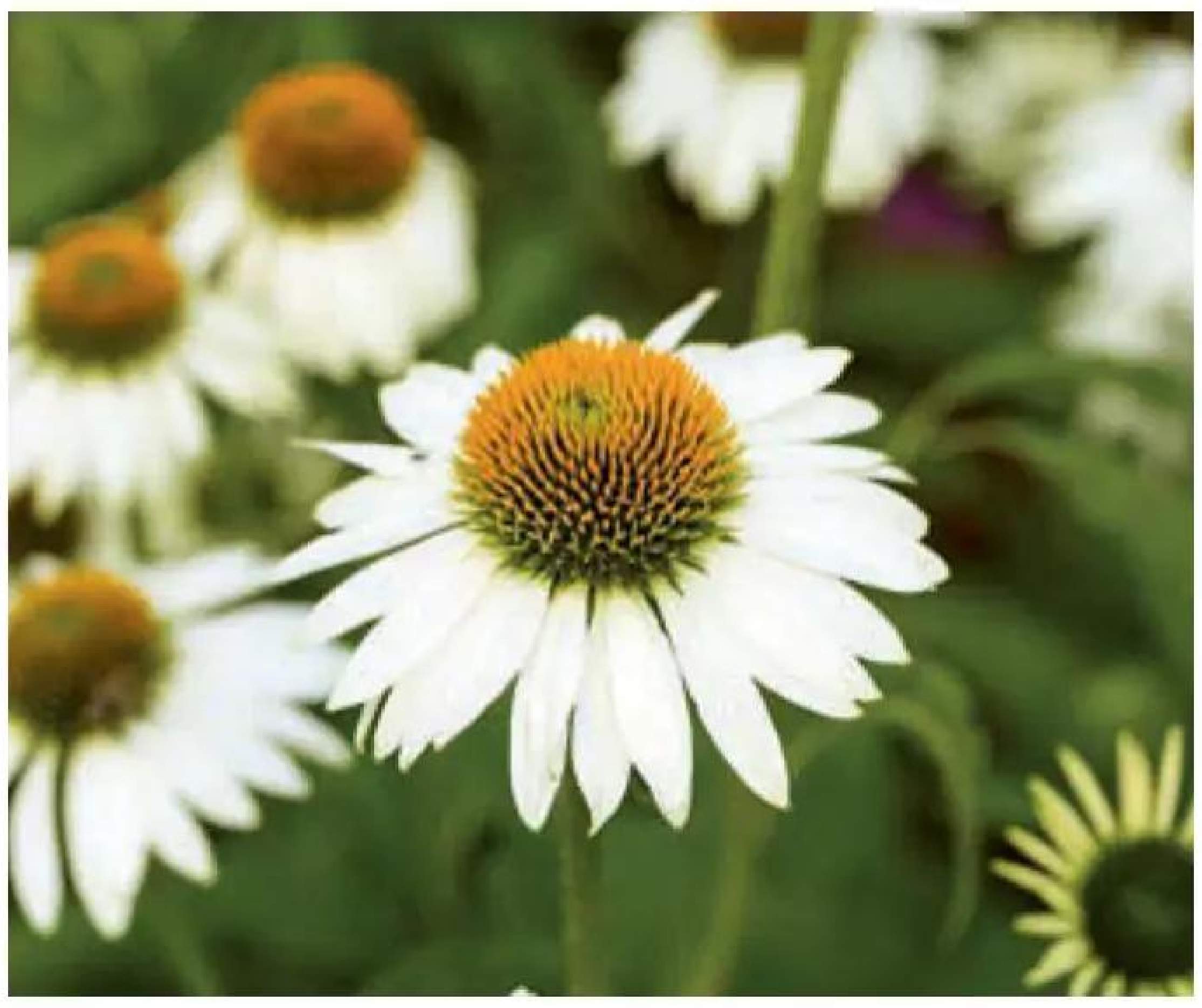
It may take a couple of years for plants to become fully established and produce abundant flowers

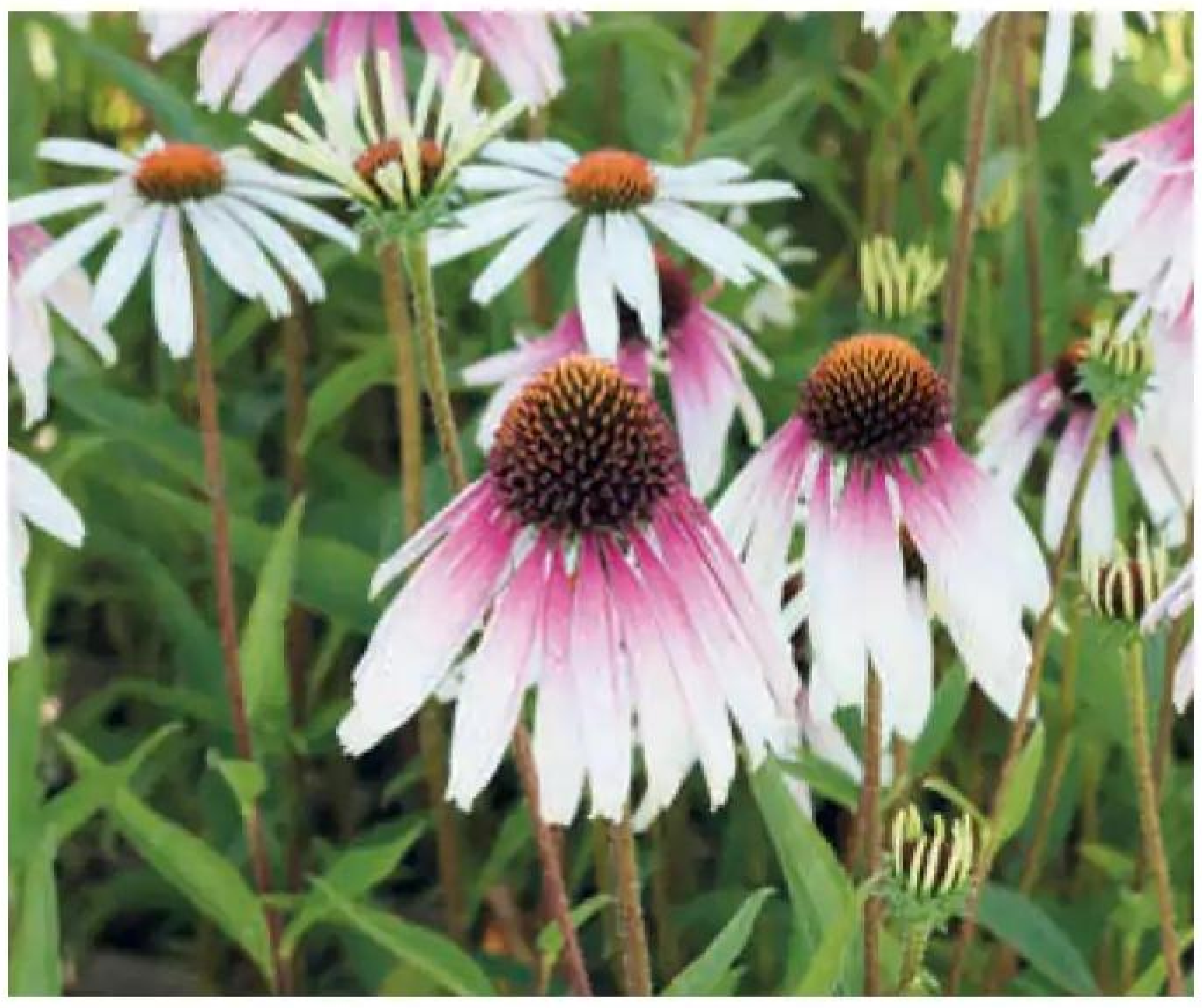
Numerous variations

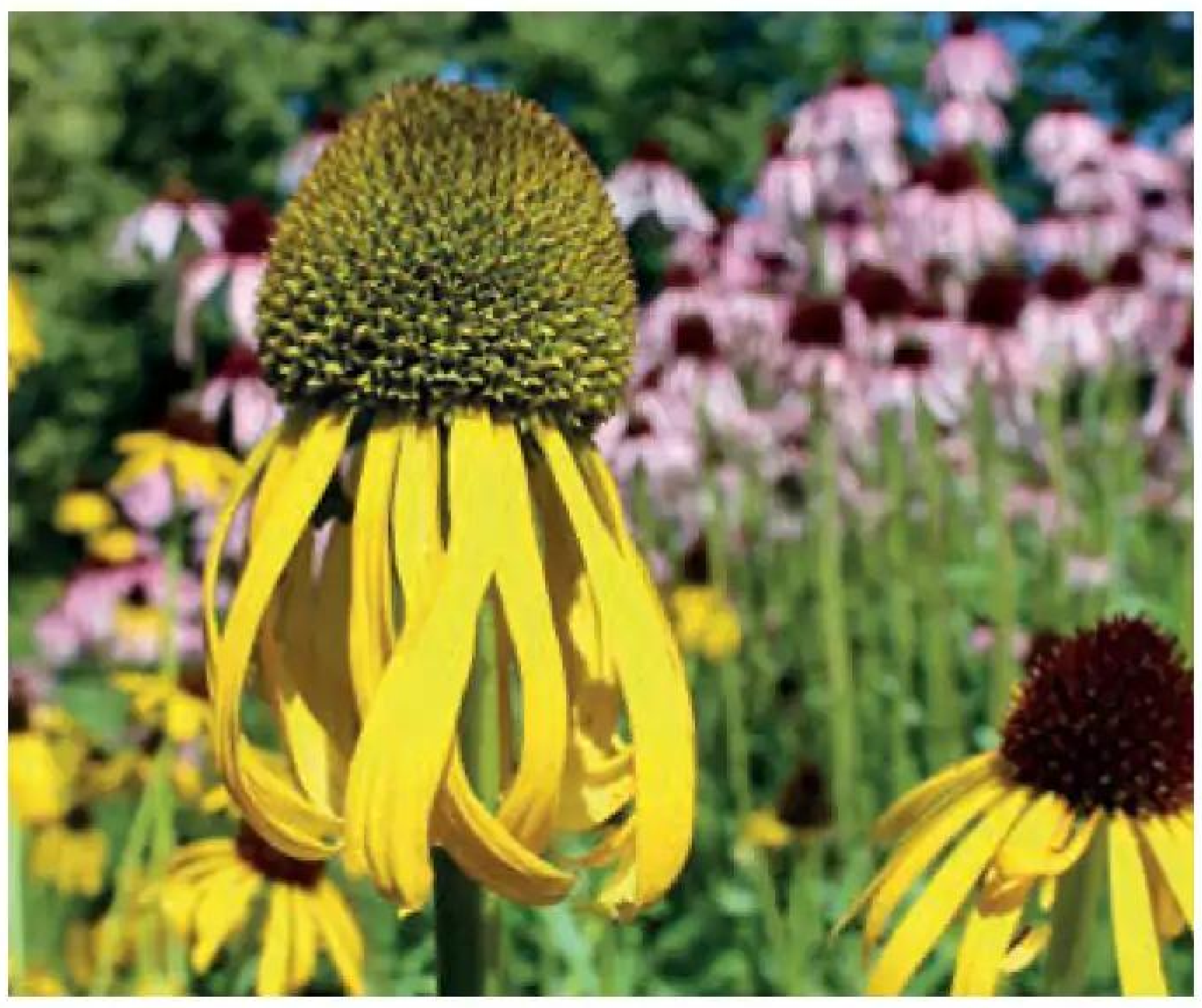
SHUTTERSTOCK

Echinaceas are members of the daisy family, *Asteraceae*, and share the typical flower form of petals sweeping back from a central cone. But over the past 25 years, plant breeders have crossed the key species plants and extended the list of cultivars to morph the classic shape, colour and form of this flower into into myriad variations – but the flowers are not actually single flowers, but rather a collection of many tiny flowers. What appears to be petals is actually a ring of sterile florets called ray florets. These surround a central cone made up of hundreds of tiny fertile flowers called disc florets. This type of flower structure is known as a composite flower head, or capitulum. Each of the tiny disc florets in the center can produce a seed, which is why the center of an echinacea flower becomes increasingly spiky as it matures – those are the developing seeds.

UNUSUAL FORMS







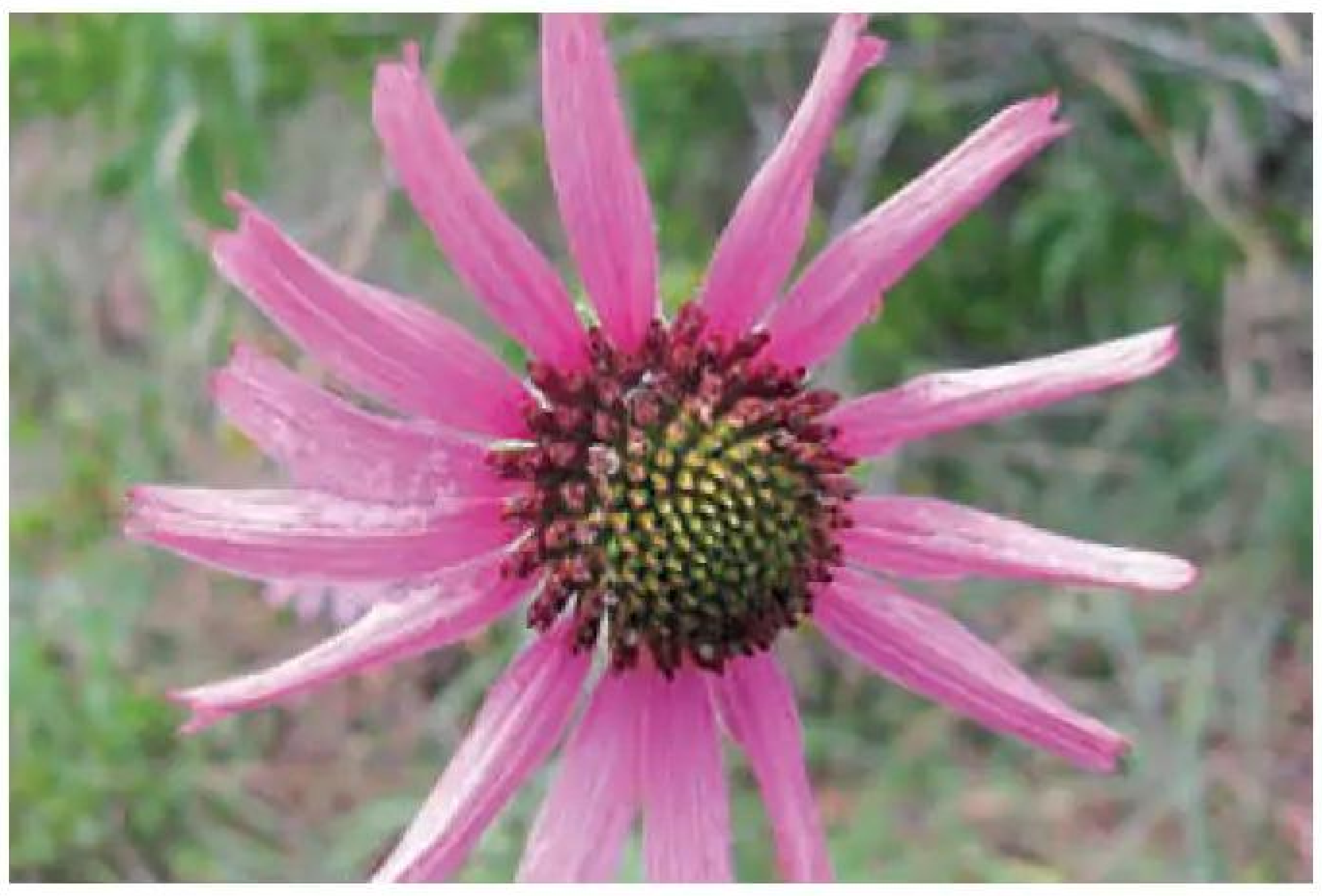
SHUTTERSTOCK

***E. purpurea* 'White Swan'**
Pure-white rays tend to hang down around the orange-brown cone and so show up well when viewed from a distance. Shorter than many other varieties, it looks good at the front of borders or in pots.
Height: 28-31in (70-80cm).

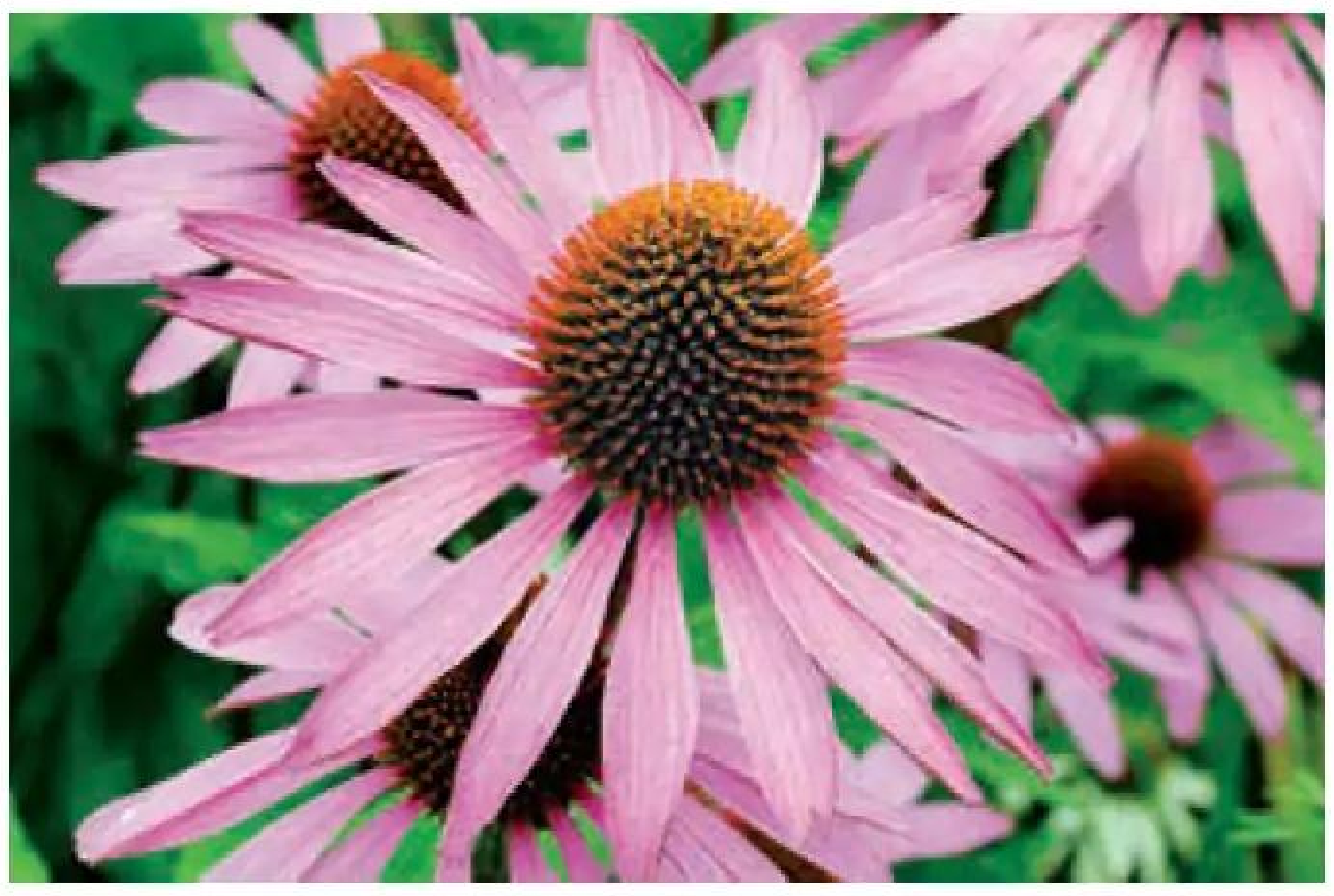
'Pretty Parasols' ('JS Engeltje')
Very striking, multi-headed stems. The unusual petals go from upright to drooping as they mature, and each is white with pink at the base. This plant withstands wind well and is useful for coastal plantings.
Height: 36in (90cm).

Echinacea paradoxa
The 'Ozark' coneflower, this is the only yellow echinacea but the backswept petals set it apart from similar-looking rudbeckias. A taller species, choose a medium-height grass to accompany it, allowing the golden blooms to float above. **Height:** 3ft (91cm).

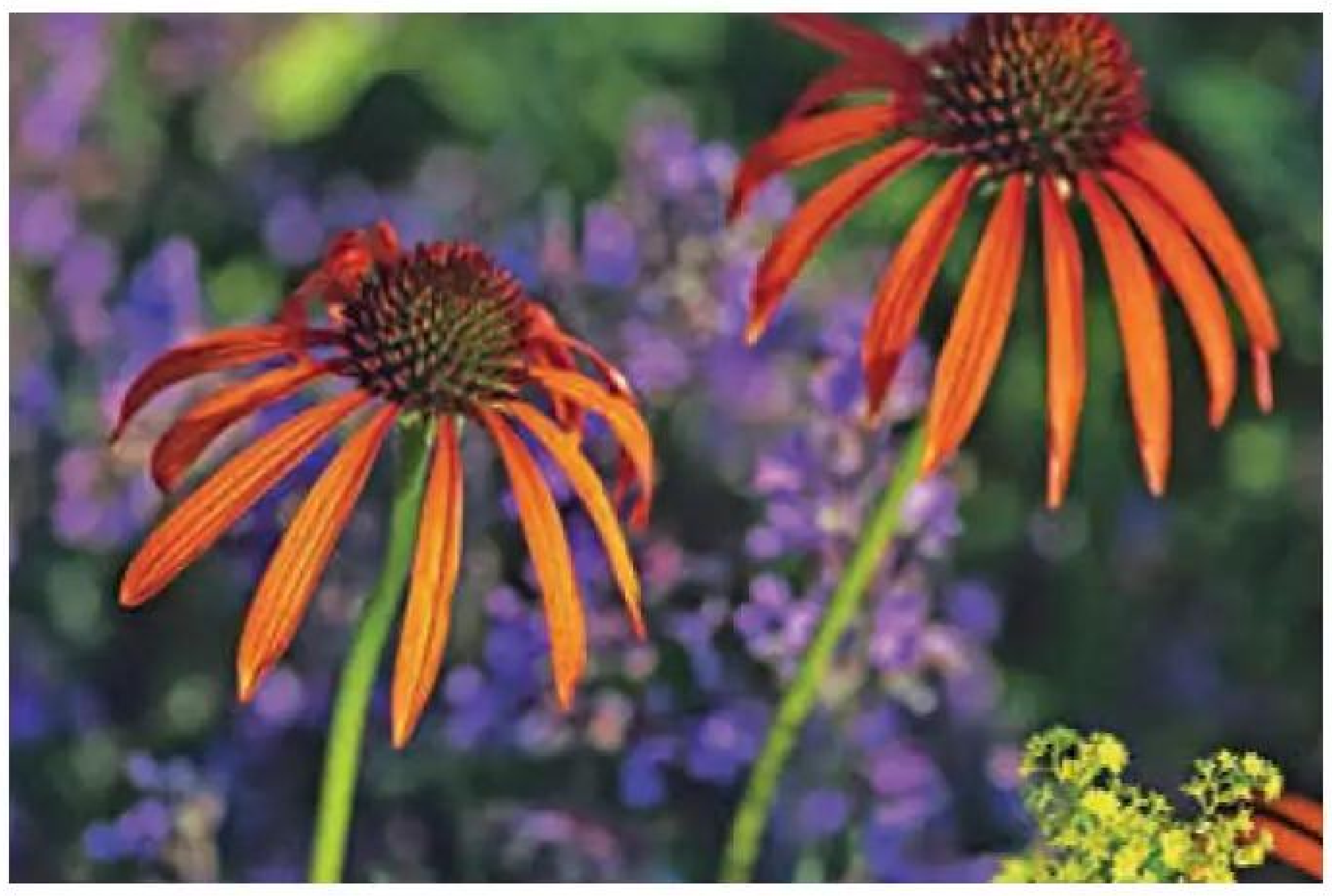
9 echinaceas… for hot colour schemes



Echinacea tennesseensis
Recommended for poor, stony soil conditions and full sun. Best grown from seed as it's not so easy to find in garden centres. Plant with shorter grasses such as *Sesleria autumnalis*. **Height:** 30in (76cm).

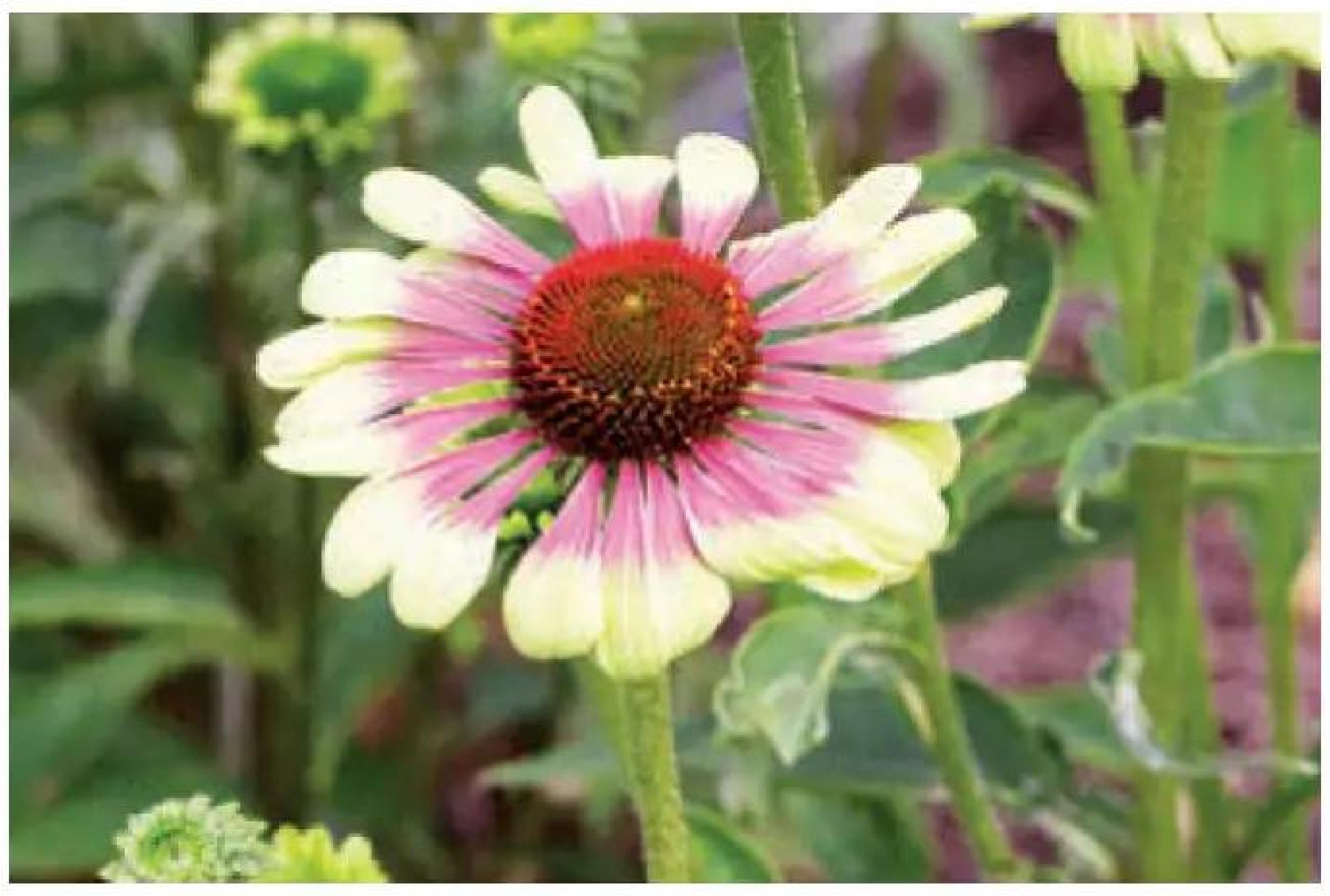


Echinacea purpurea 'Magnus'
Although this is winter hardy, save seed to increase your stock. Good for large planting areas, try a swathe of 'Magnus' next to a similar sized block of the steely blue Panicum virgatum 'Heavy Metal'. **Height:** 36in (91cm).

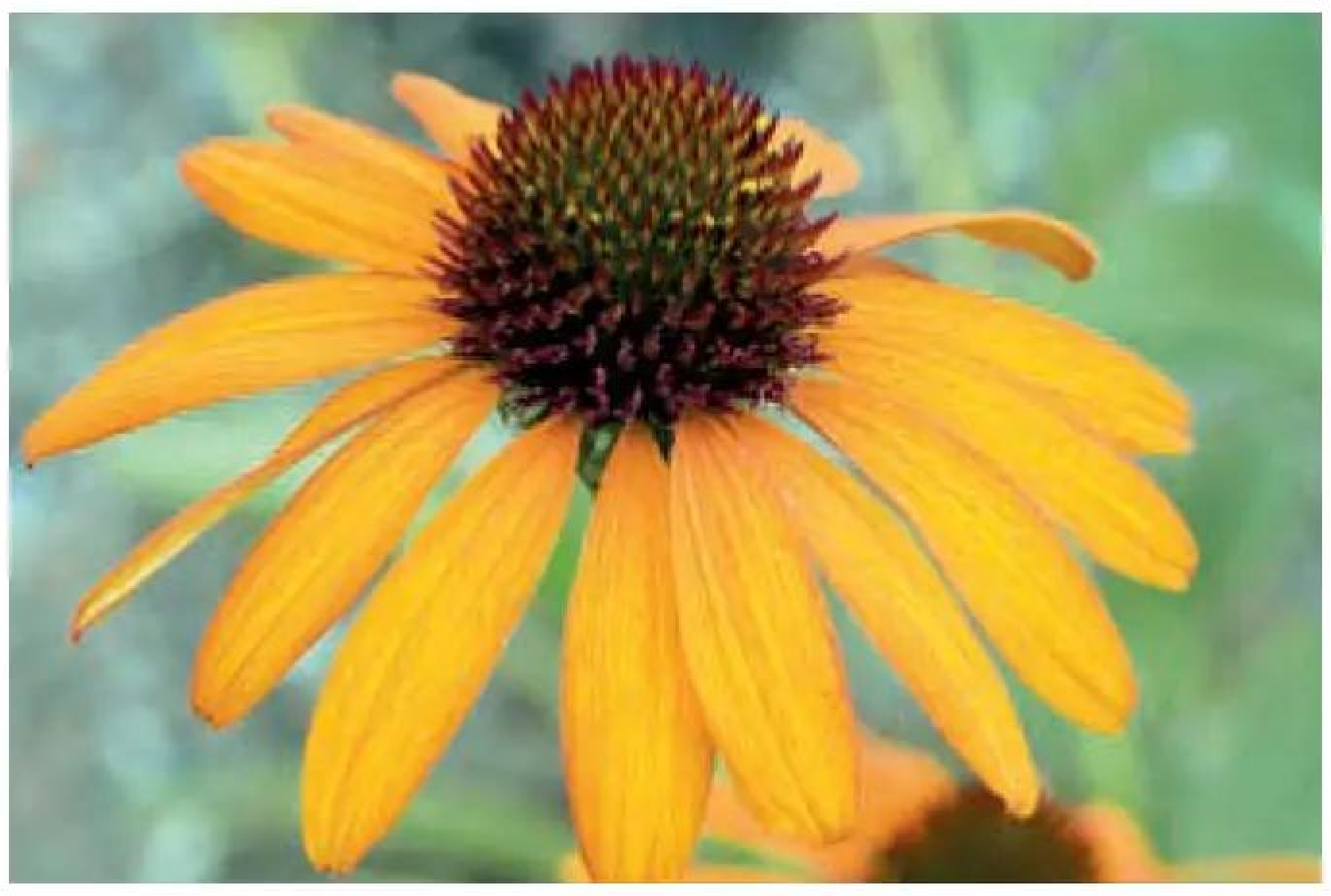


SHUTTERSTOCK

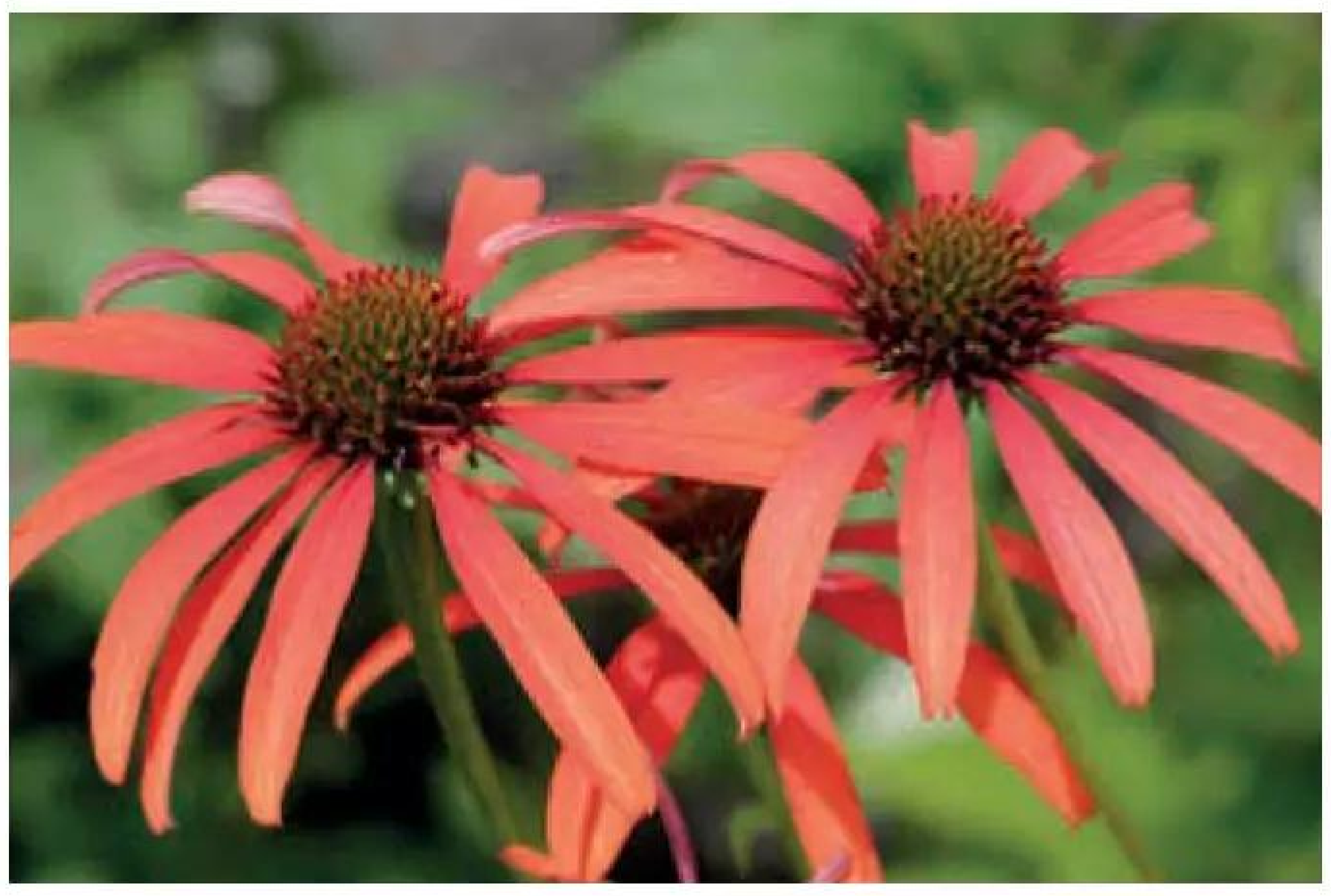
Echinacea 'Art's Pride'
A tough, reliable and compact variety, good for smaller spaces. The slender petals arch back from the cone. Plant in groups and with the grassy textures and tones of *Anemanthele lessoniana*. **Height:** 30in (76cm).



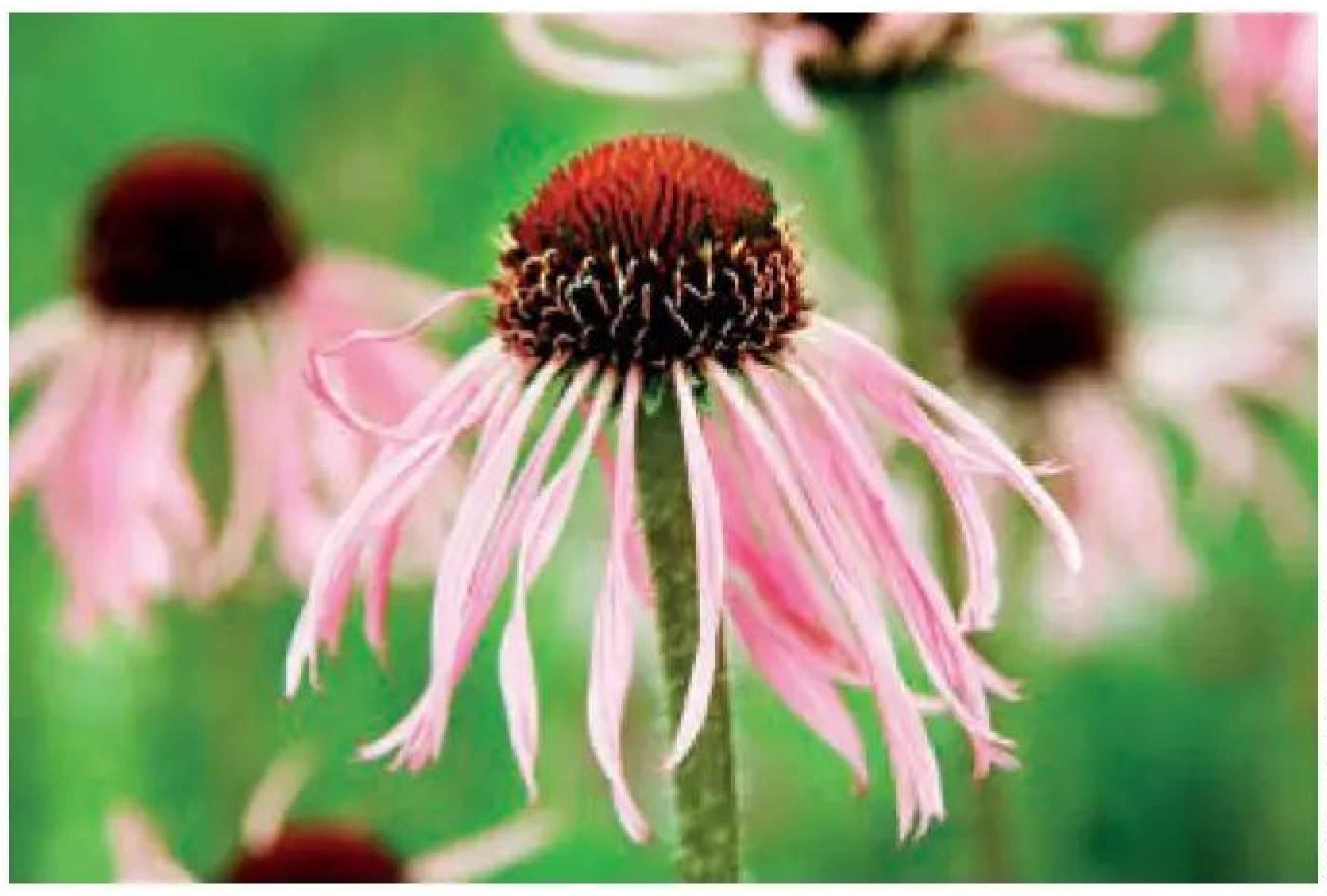
Echinacea purpurea 'Green Twister'
This unique variety has bicolor petals. The green edges deepen in colour as the flower matures. It's good for containers, plant with *Gaura lindheimerei* and pennisetum in a large pot. **Height:** 36in (91cm).



Echinacea 'Tiki Torch'
With simple daisy-type, orange flowers, this is quite a compact cultivar, good for planting into gravel or using in containers. Plant alongside shorter grasses such as *Stipa tenuissima*. **Height:** 24in (60cm).



Echinacea 'Tomato Soup'
The perfect addition to a fiery summer border. It's reportedly quite vigorous, and with flowers in a poker hot red, it will combine beautifully with cannas, dahlias and rudbeckias to make a sunny border zing. **Height:** 3ft (90cm).



SHUTTERSTOCK

Echinacea pallida
The source of many newer cultivars, with its graceful, pale pinky-purple petals. It's easy to grow from seed and produces lots of flowers over a long period. The flowers are also good for cutting. **Height:** 30in (76cm).

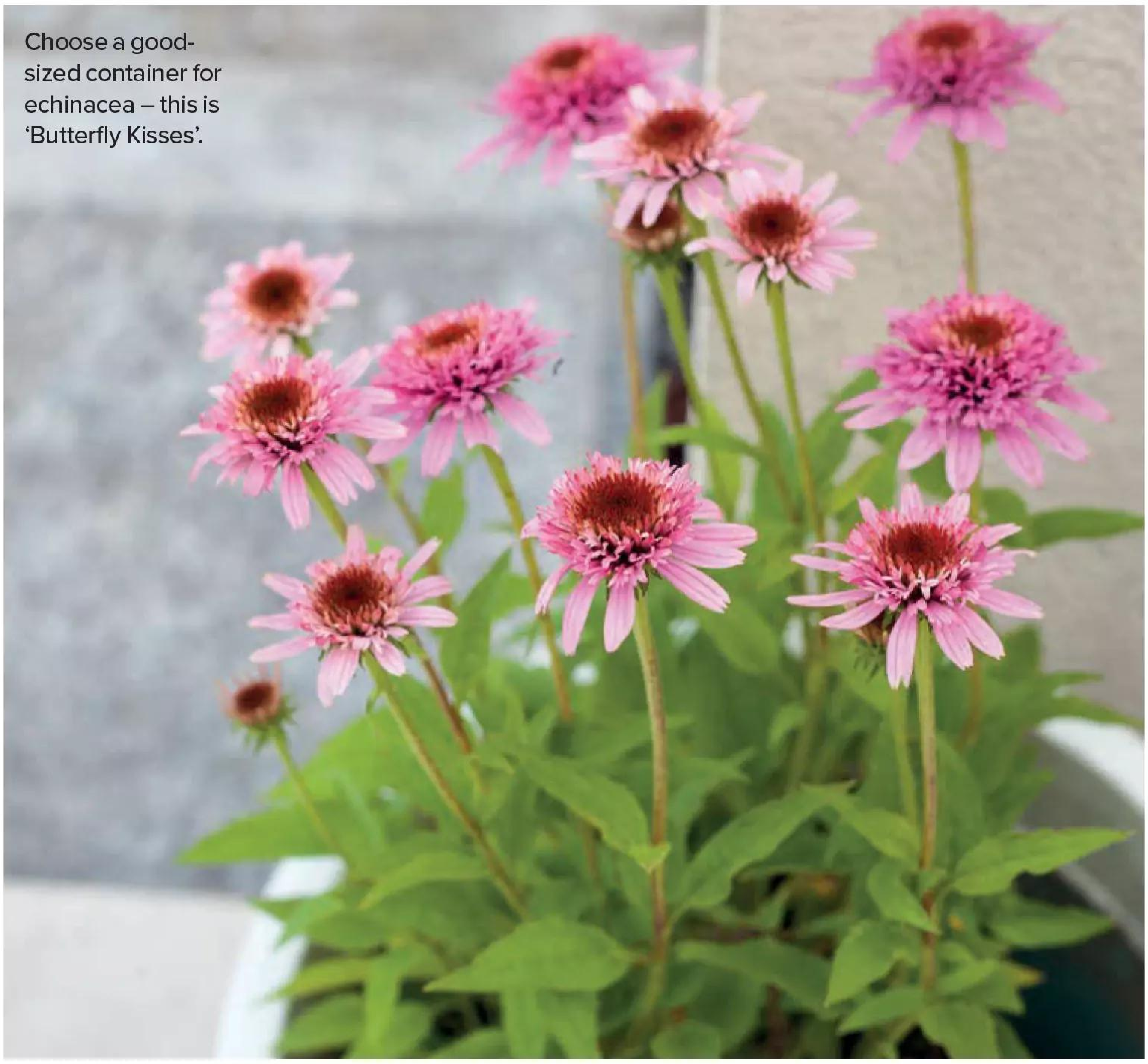
SHUTTERSTOCK

Echinacea purpurea 'Magnus Superior'
This cultivar is sturdier than 'Magnus', with larger flowers. Plant a good distance apart so it can establish comfortably. Plant with Perovskia 'Blue Spire'. **Height:** 30in (76cm).

SHUTTERSTOCK

E. purpurea 'Rubinstern'
Another improved form of 'Magnus', this has unusually large flowers with petals in a red-prurple that are held horizontally around striking, large, dark bronze cones. **Height:** 39in (1m).

Top tip You can grow echinaceas in pots, using a well-drained, fertile compost mix and site the pot in full sun. Choose a large container, as *echinacea* like plenty of space, so don't cram in too many plants



Choose a good-sized container for echinacea – this is 'Butterfly Kisses'.

PLANTING ECHINACEA

Echinceas thrive in deep, well-drained, fertile and humus-rich soil in full sun. Prepare the soil before planting adding in large amounts well-rotted manure or compost.

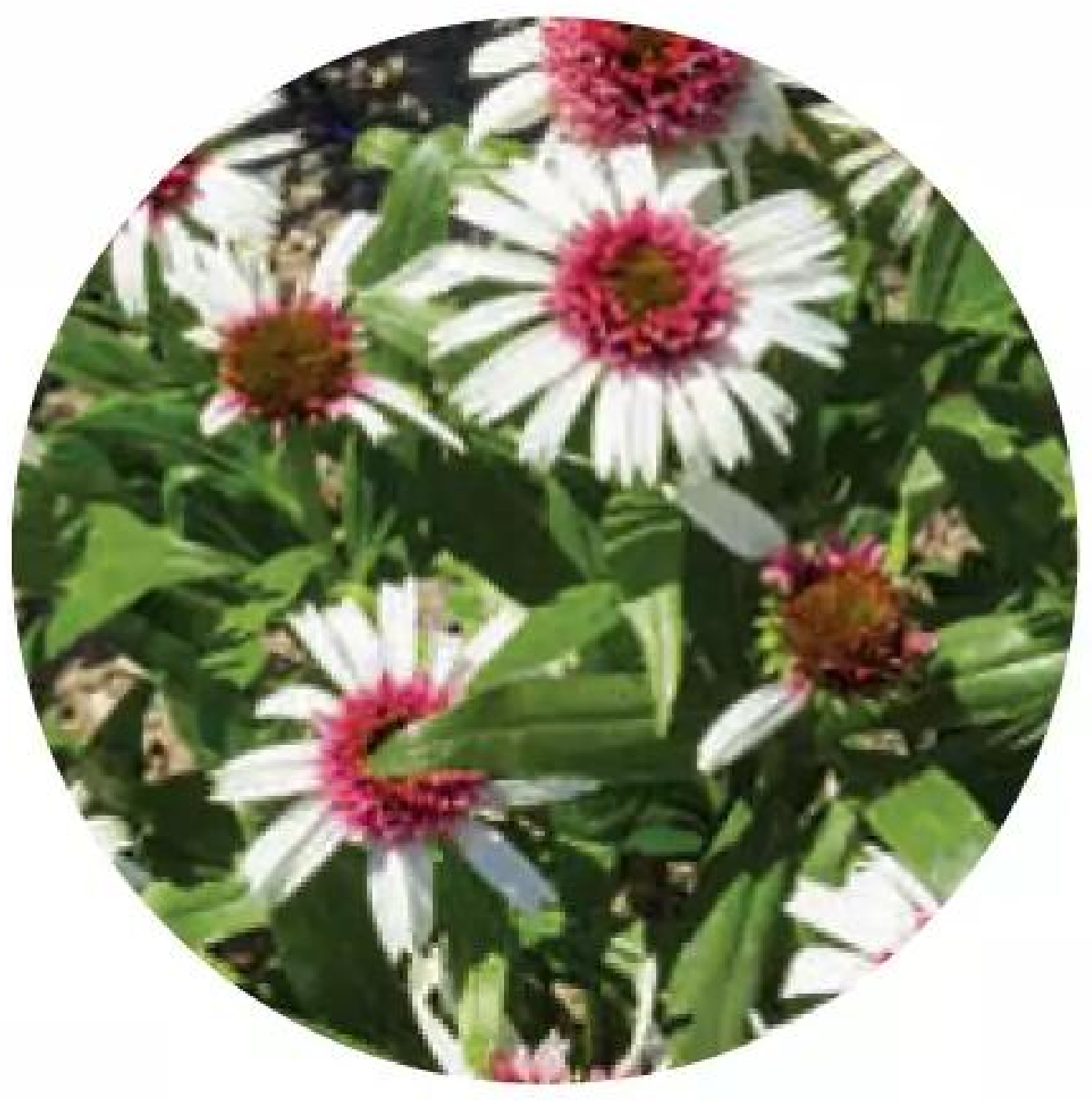
One of the reasons echinaceas may not survive the winter is waterlogged ground. Always plant on a raised or sloping part of your garden. If you plant on the top of even a gentle slope, this will help, or plant into raised beds.

After flowering, you can choose to cut stems back and aim for a second flush of blooms, or leave the flowers standing for their winter silhouette.

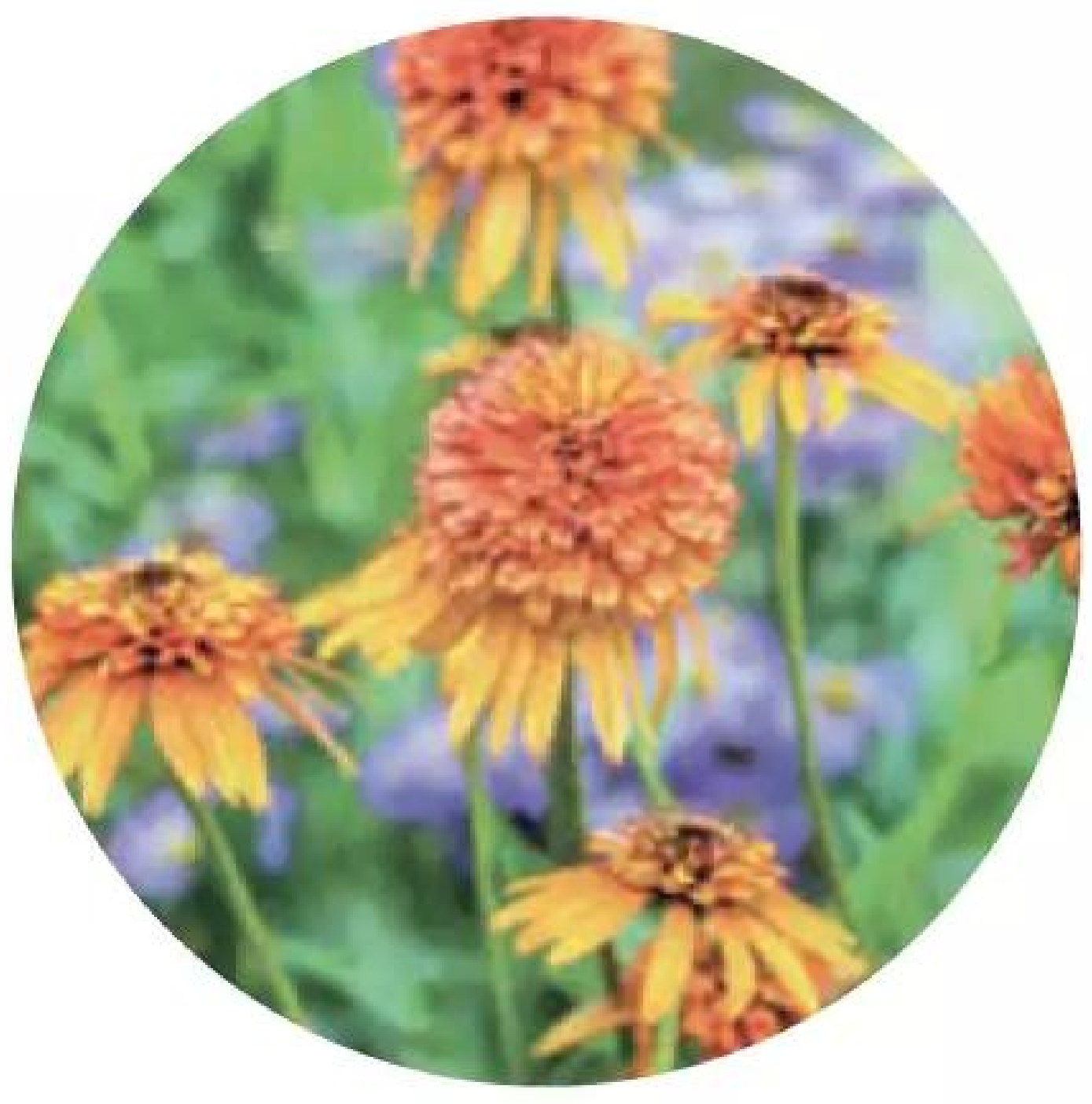
Once established, echinacea don't appreciate being moved, so allow for plenty of space for them to form clumps, when planting. If you want to increase your stock and insure against losing your echinaceas, save the seed. You can also propagate cultivars from root cuttings in late autumn, once the plant is fully dormant. Carefully lift mature clumps and take cuttings from the side. Grow these on and place in a heated propagator in spring.

Did you know... The name 'echinacea' comes from the Greek word 'echinos', meaning hedgehog or sea urchin

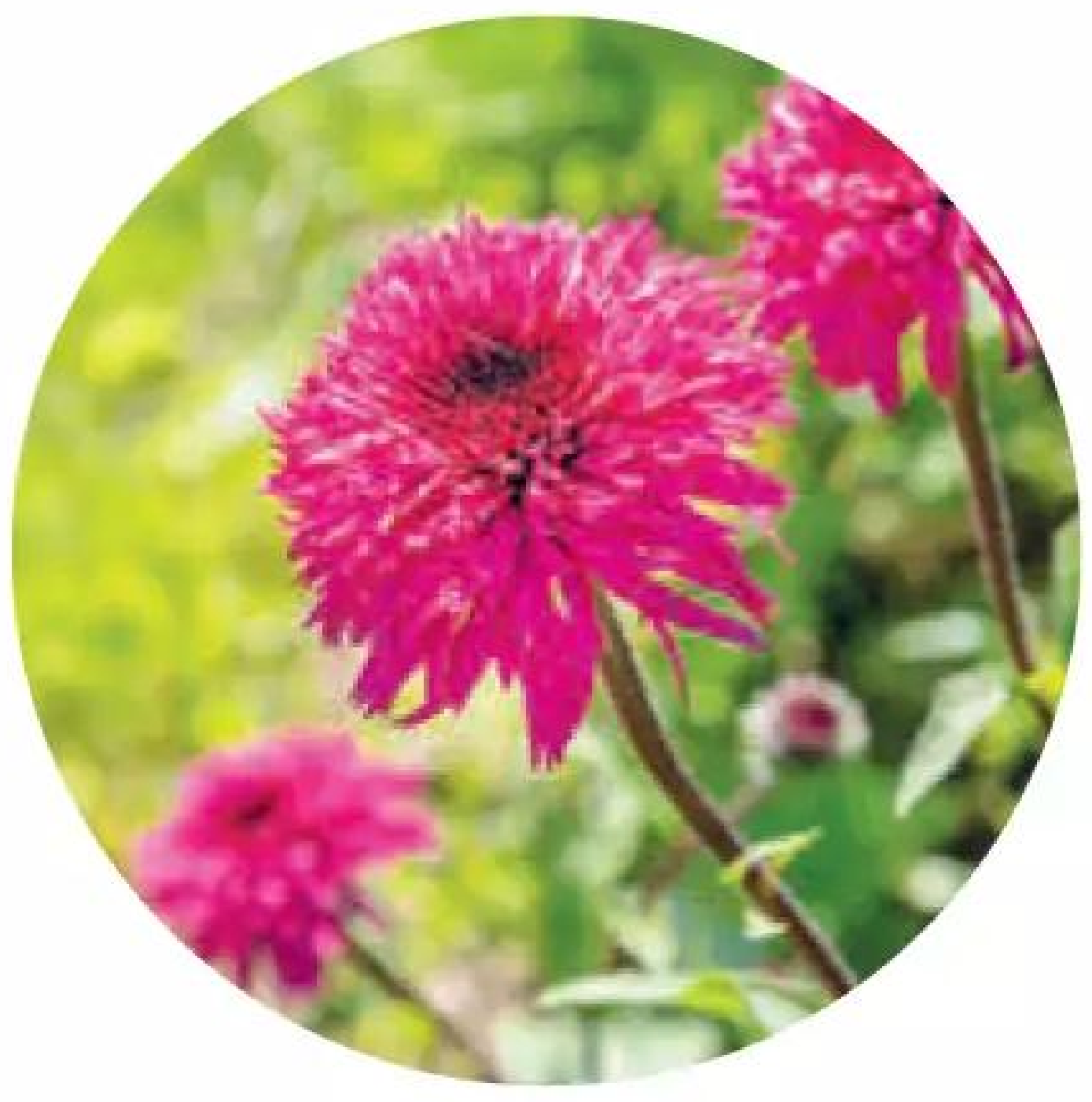
3 double Cultivars



***Echinacea* 'Strawberry and Cream'**
These oversized mop-top style central cones are typical of the newer cultivars, and shorter surrounding petals. It will fascinate young gardeners as it really does look a bit like an ice cream.



***Echinacea* 'Marmalade'**
Another 'fancy' coneflower with burnt-orange colouring and the double, mop-top style centre. This looks very different from other echinaceas! It is a good choice for containers.



***Echinacea* 'Blackberry Truffle'**
A pompom of 'fluffy' double flowerheads in rich-pink and no surrounding petals. These flowers are offset by the maroon stems that carry them. It makes a great cut flower. Grow singly in containers, with erigeron around the base.

Dahlia

Asteraceae

Plant: spring
Position: full sun
Hardiness: -5°C
Propagate: division, cuttings or seed

No longer achingly unfashionable, the glorious dahlia is the flower of the moment

It kind of happened overnight, and we have Instagram to thank for its meteoric revival and rise. The colour and beauty of a dahlia is extremely photogenic, and now everyone wants to grow them.

It's often said that if you don't like dahlias, it's just because you haven't found the right one. 'Thomas A. Edison' is a sumptuous mass of dark purple, while 'Wizard of Oz' is a tightly packed dainty ball of pink and white. Single-flowered varieties such as the yellow 'Bishop of York' are fantastic for pollinators, the long-stemmed 'Karma' range have been bred for cutting, and 'Honka' dahlias have flowers reminiscent of childhood beach windmills.

When it comes to size, the tree dahlia, *Dahlia imperialis*, can reach a towering 4m (13ft) while dwarf varieties including 'Gallery Art Nouveau' get to around 35cm (14in), making them perfect for the front of borders or containers.

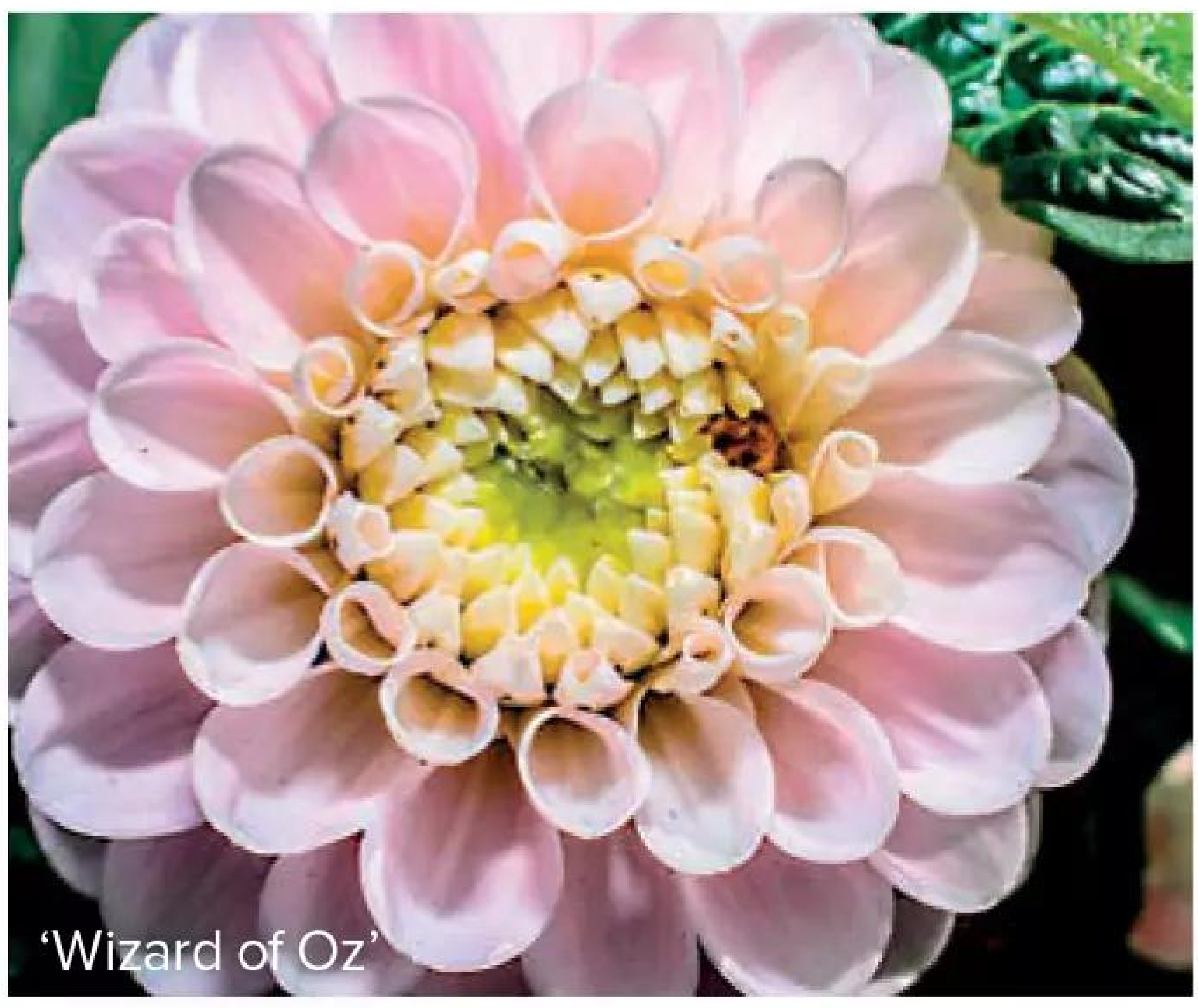
Dahlias are divided into 15 different classifications that include paeony, stellar, star, cactus, pompon, waterlily and collarette. Within that there is every colour except a true blue, from clear whites and pinks through to orange, yellow, dark purple and red.

Top tip...
Dahlias are hungry plants; feed nitrogen before flowering and potassium when flowering

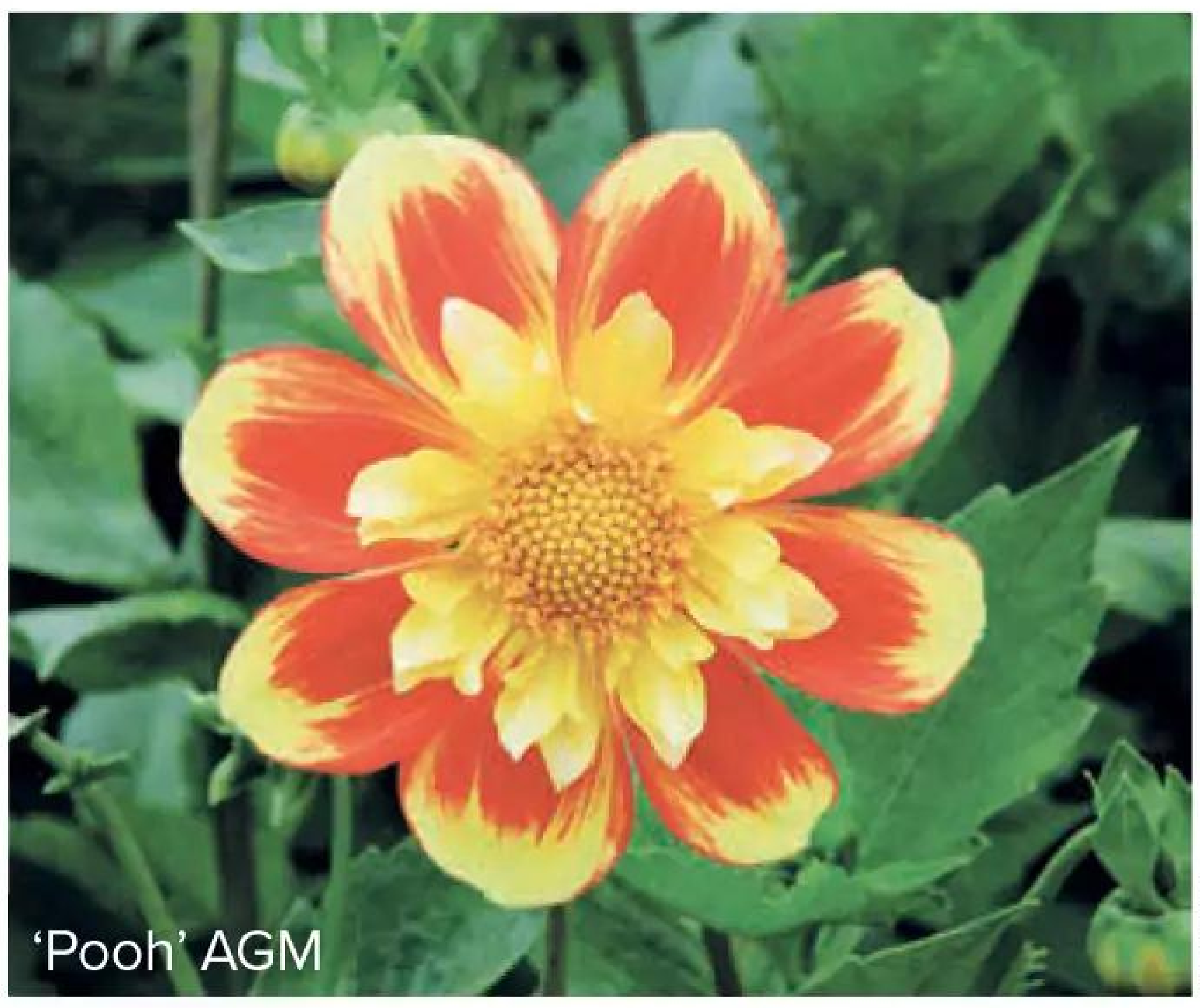
'Great Silence'

SHUTTERSTOCK

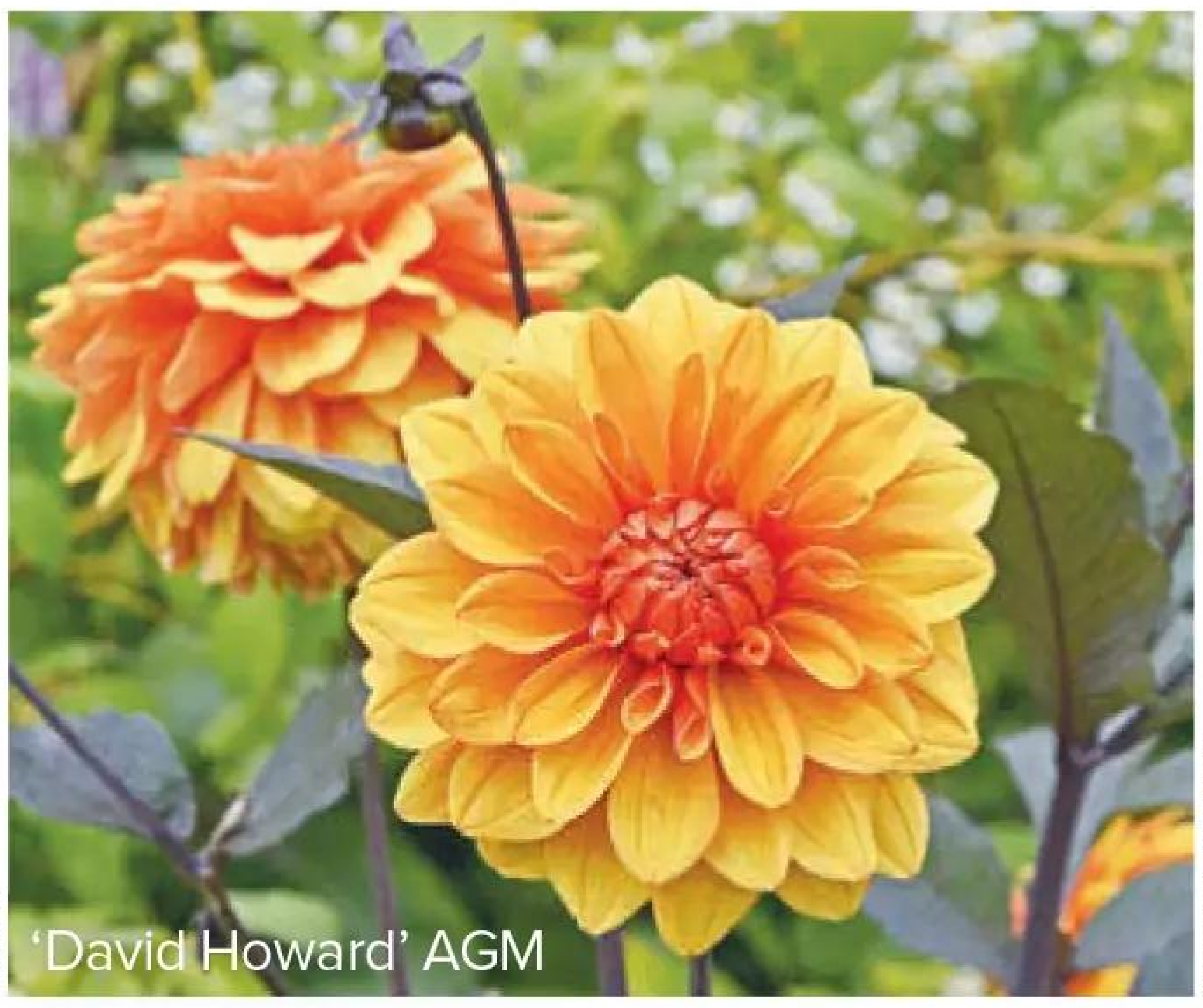
Did you know... Dahlias were originally cultivated as a food crop rather than for their flowers! The Aztecs grew them for their edible tubers, which they ate like potatoes


‘Wizard of Oz’

SHUTTERSTOCK


‘Pooh’ AGM

ALAMY


‘David Howard’ AGM

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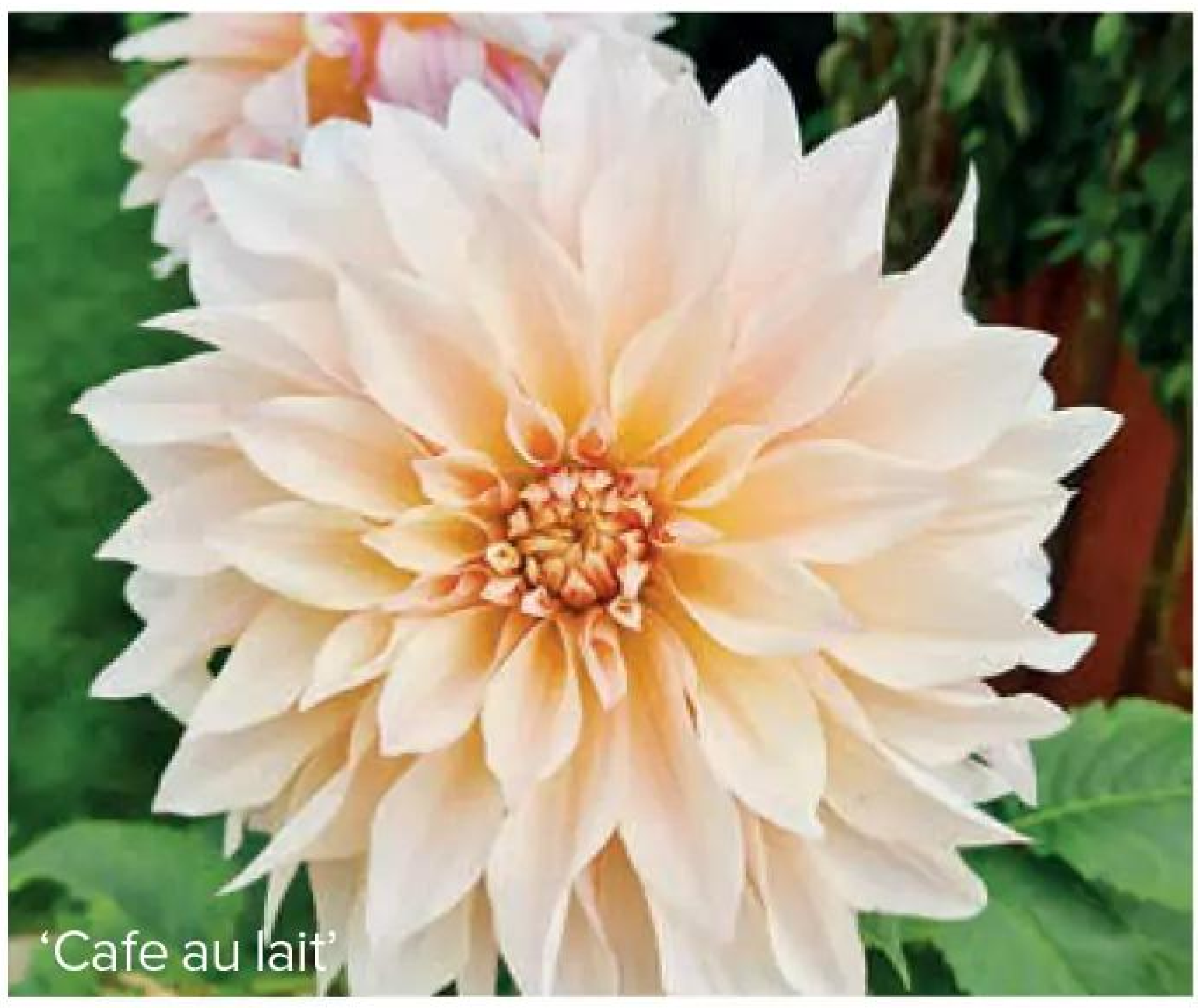
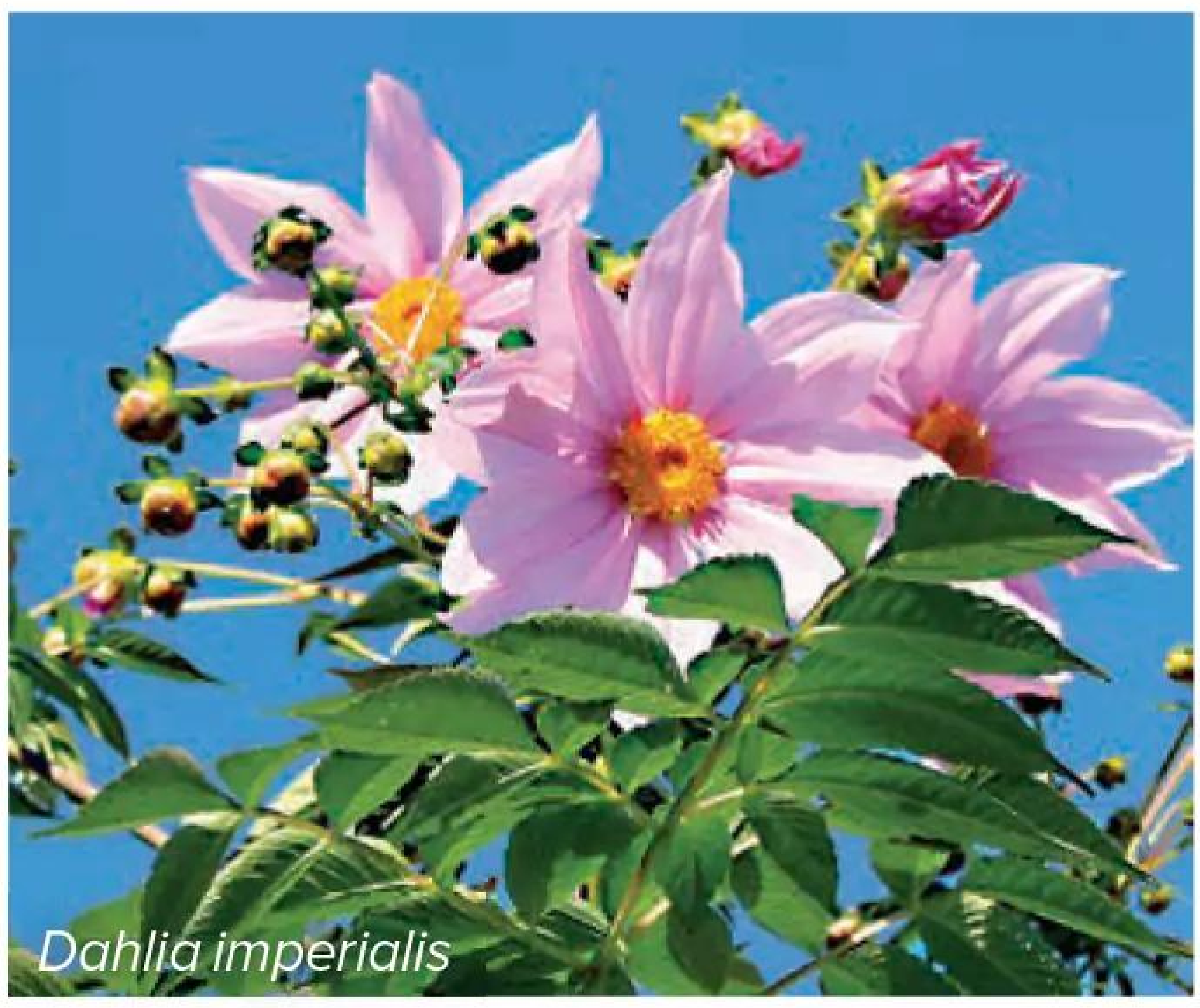
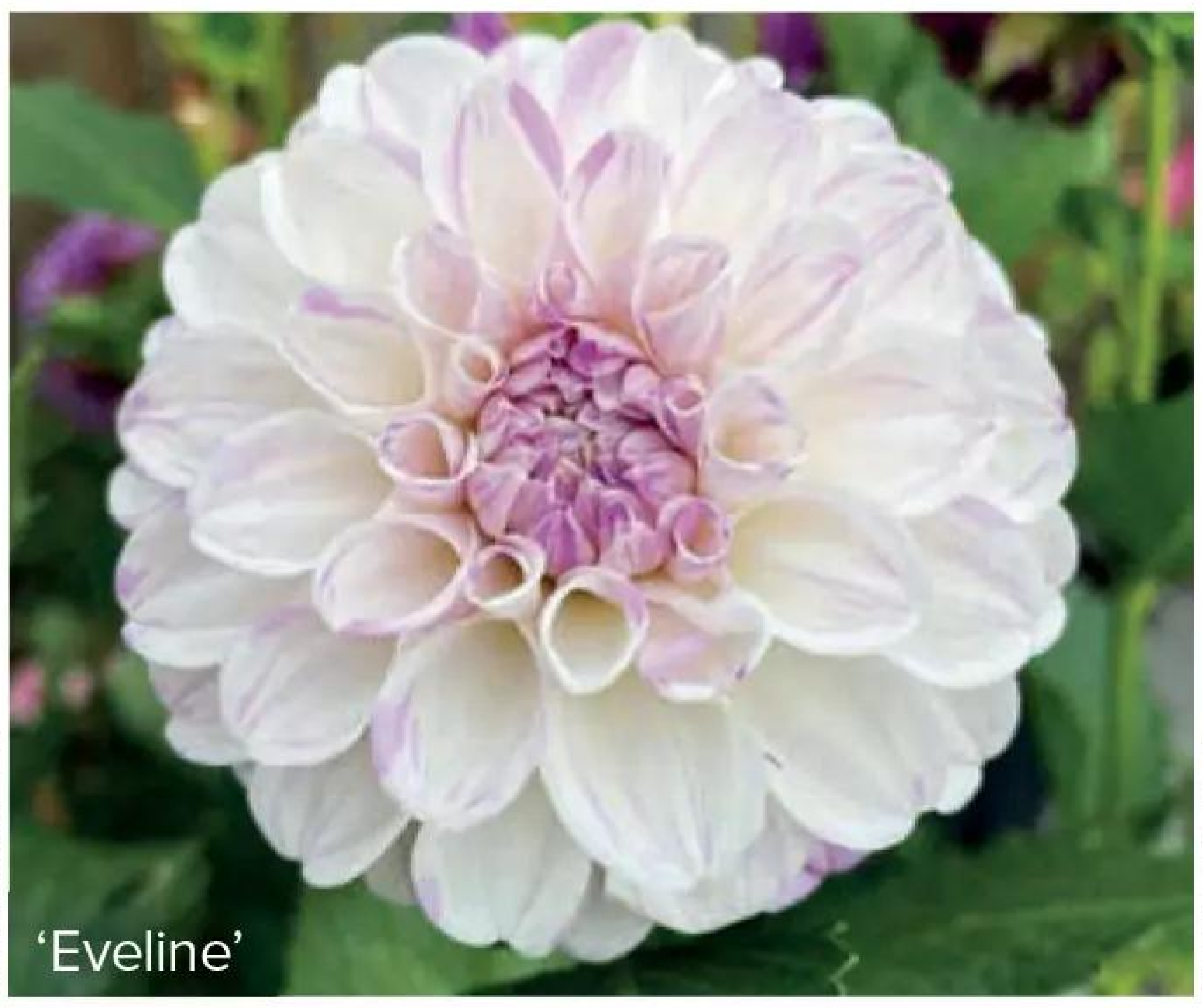

‘Cafe au lait’

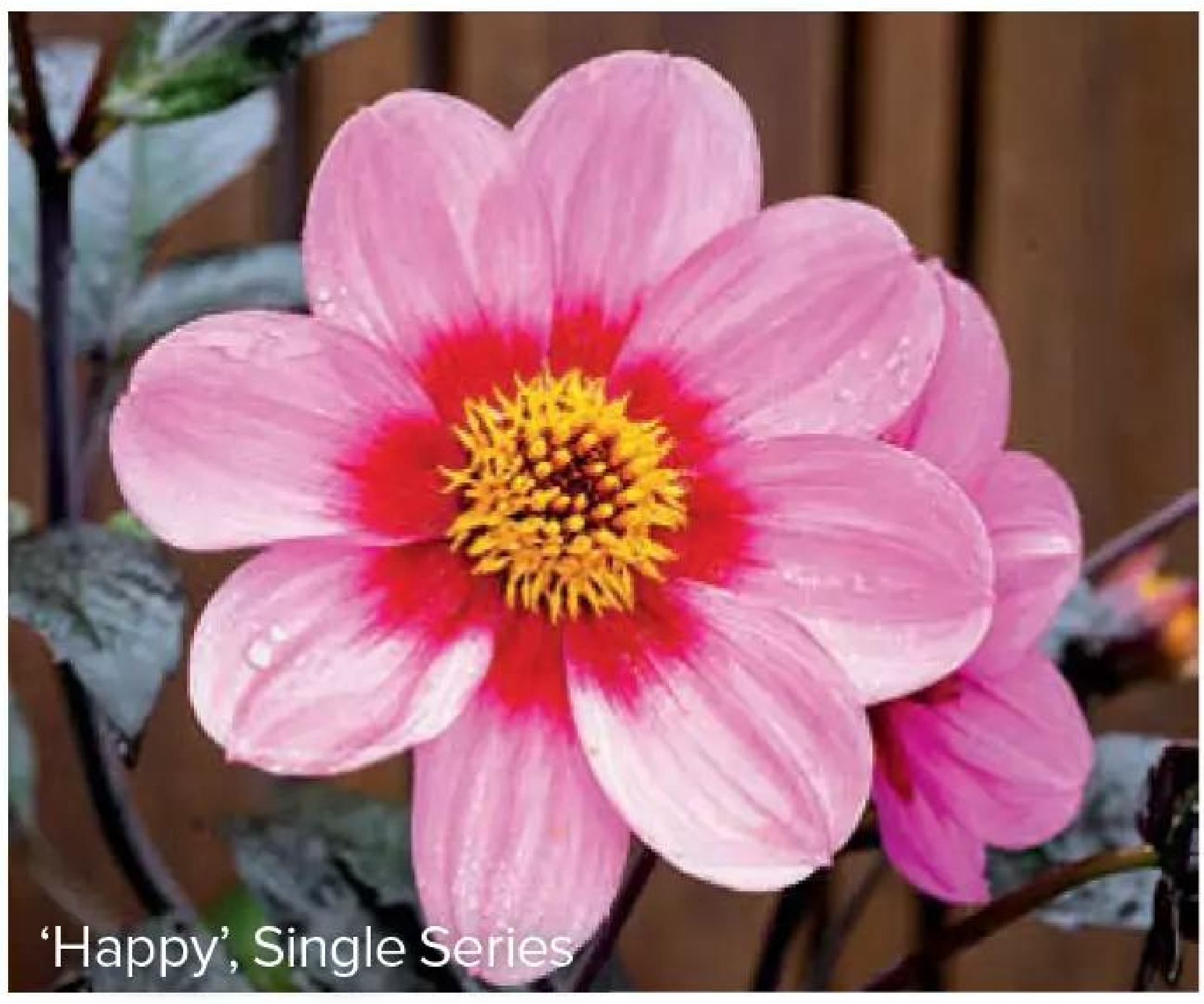
SHUTTERSTOCK


Dahlia imperialis

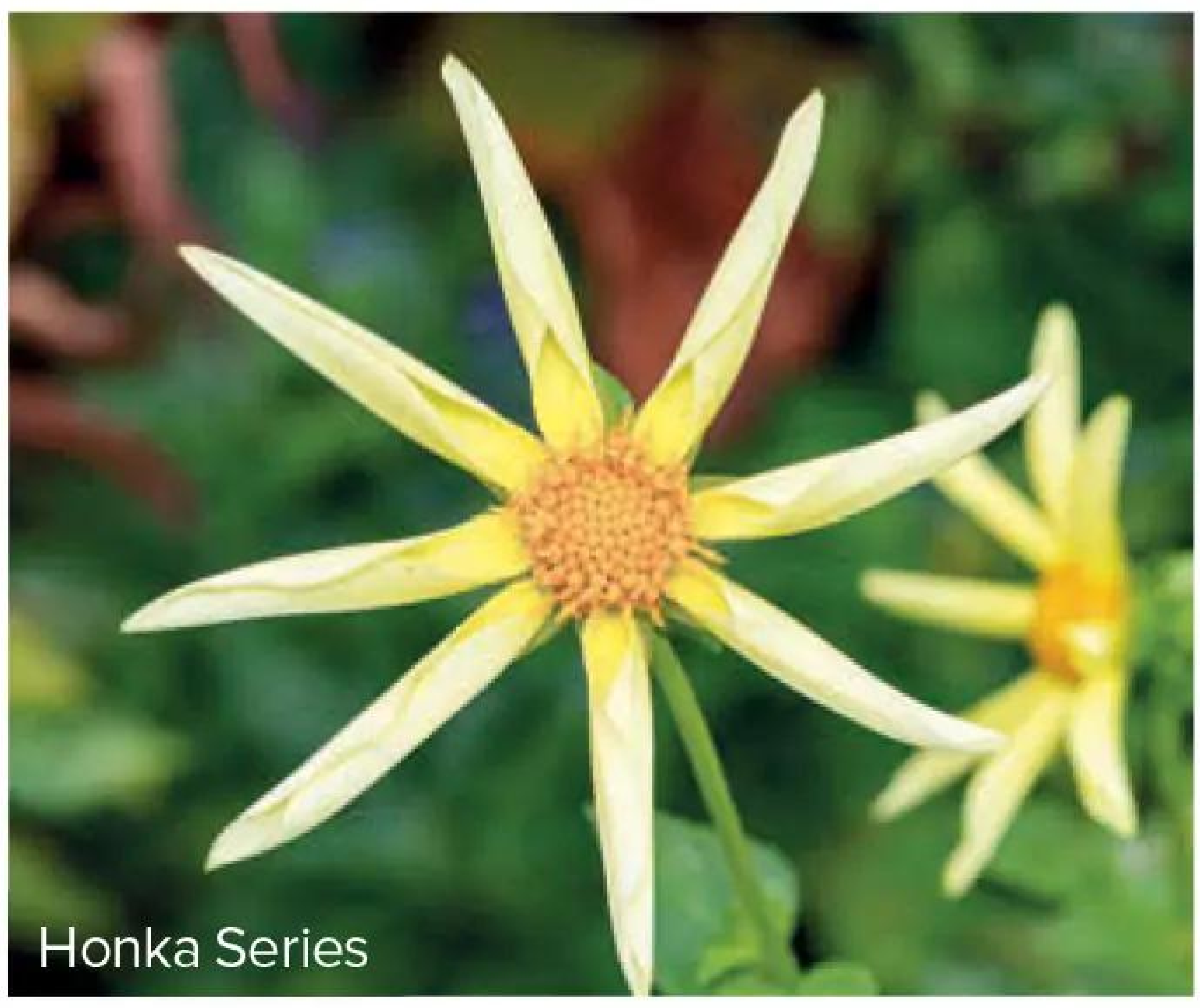
SHUTTERSTOCK


‘Eveline’

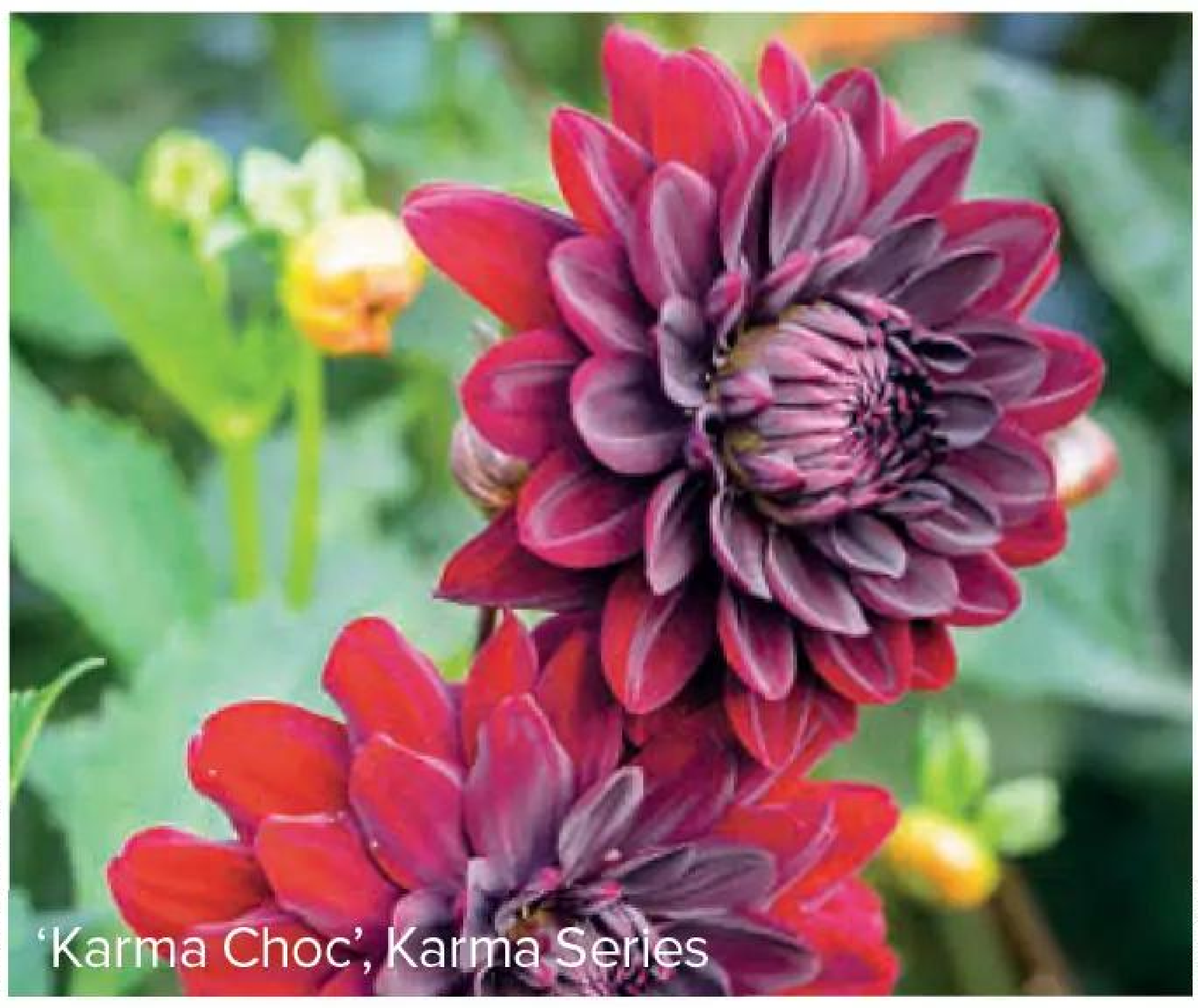
SHUTTERSTOCK


‘Happy’, Single Series

SHUTTERSTOCK


Honka Series

SHUTTERSTOCK


‘Karma Choc’, Karma Series

ALAMY

GROWING ADVICE

In early spring, plant tubers in peat-free compost in a one-litre pot. Keep moist an protect from frost. Pinch out the top when four pairs of leaves have grown. After the last frost, harden off and plant out.

If your soil is heavy and waterlogged in winter, lift the tubers before the first frost, trim the stems to a few centimetres, turn upsidedown and allow to dry for a few weeks. Cover with old compost/sand or woodshavings to insulate them and store in a frost-free, cool dark place. Check regularly and remove any rotting tubers. If leaving the tubers in the ground, cut down after the first frost and apply a thick mulch to the crown.

Dahlias are easy to grow from seed, but aren’t as good as those from cuttings/division.

WITH SEAWEED

Pests and diseases

Slugs and snails love new dahlia shoots. Use spent coffee grounds, crushed eggshells, beer traps, or nematode solutions. Earwigs are partial to the petals. Catch them with a flowerpot stuffed with straw, upturned on a bamboo cane next to the plant. Empty the pot every morning and dispose of them elsewhere (don’t kill them, they eat aphids!). Dahlia gall is a bacterial infection that produces swollen growth on the tuber (crown gall) or distorted ground level shoots (leafy gall). Dispose of infected tubers, do not compost, and disinfect tools.

Ornamental sage

Salvia

Plant: spring/early autumn

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: tender to -15°C

Propagate: late spring/early autumn

With their many forms and colours, salvias add zing!

Ornamental salvias are prized for their vibrant colours, long blooming periods, and ability to attract pollinators. These versatile members of the sage family offer a wide range of sizes, shapes, and colours, making them suitable for various garden styles and settings, either planted in drifts, as specimens or in containers. Use *S. Nachtvlinder* under rose bushes, where its scent is said to deter aphids, or interplanted with dark pink Penstemons, which will poke their nodding heads up through its leaves. Scarlet varieties such as *Salvia splendens* 'Van Houttei', can be used as a focal point to draw the eye to a particular vista, or en masse as a bedding plant. *Salvia nemorosa* is known for its compact habit and purple spikes, *S. guaranitica* for its striking blue flowers, while the hardy *Salvia x sylvestris* cultivars provide reliable summer colour.

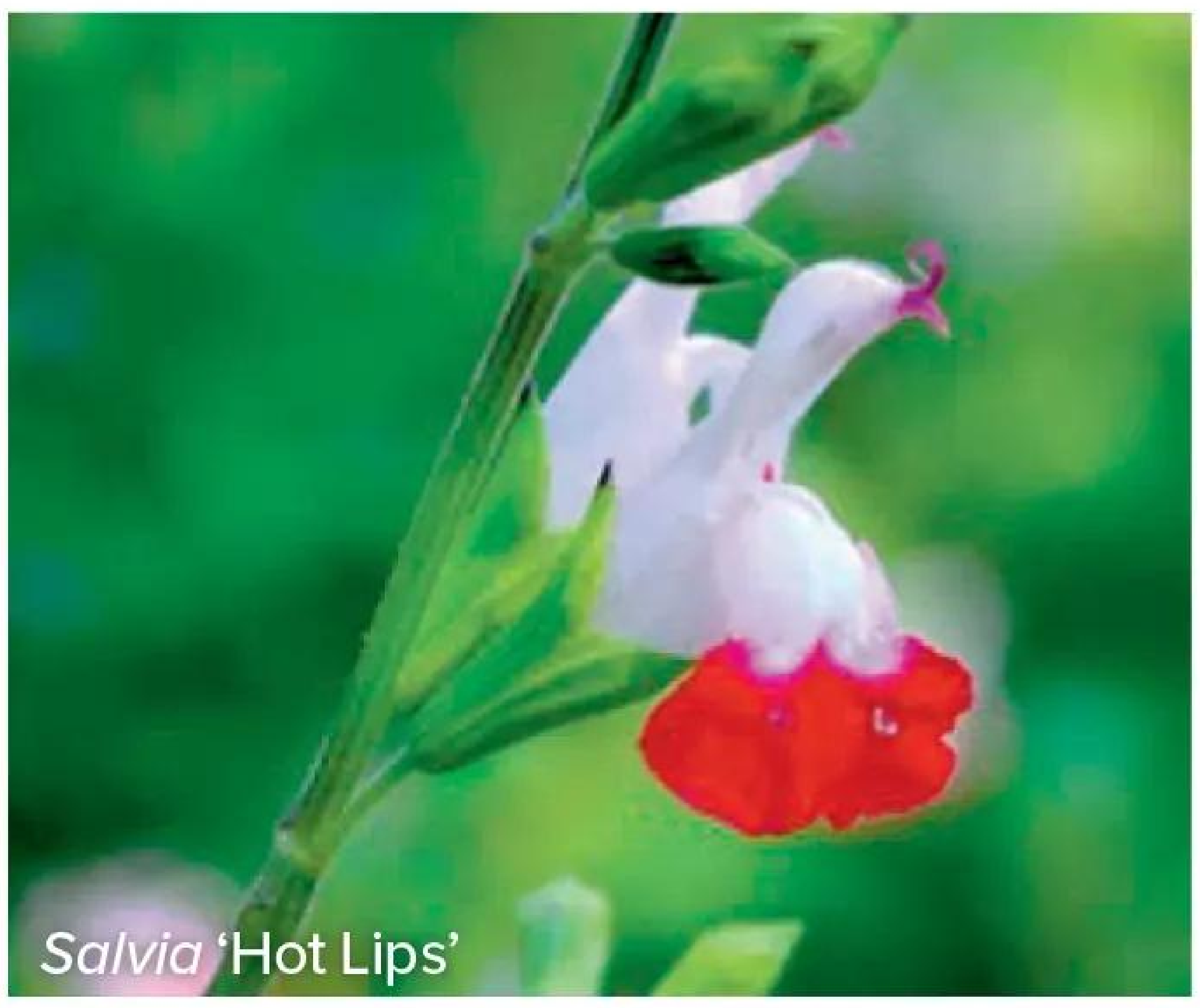
Salvias often bloom from early summer well into autumn, and their aromatic foliage adds sensory appeal, while their nectar-rich flowers are a magnet for bees and butterflies.

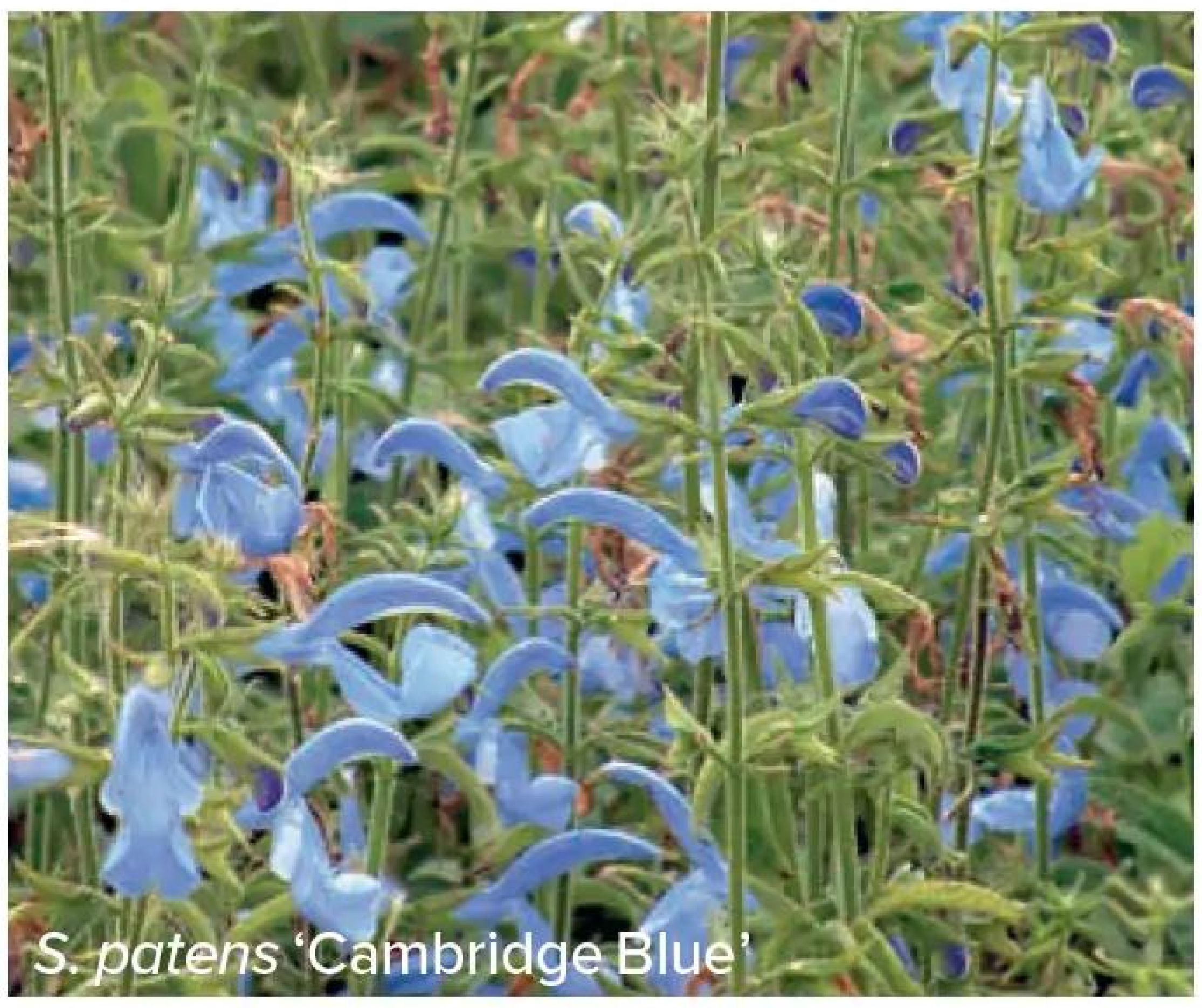
Once established, salvias are particularly valued for their drought tolerance. They perform best in full sun and well-drained soil, although some varieties can tolerate partial shade. Many salvias are also deer-resistant, adding to their appeal in rural gardens.

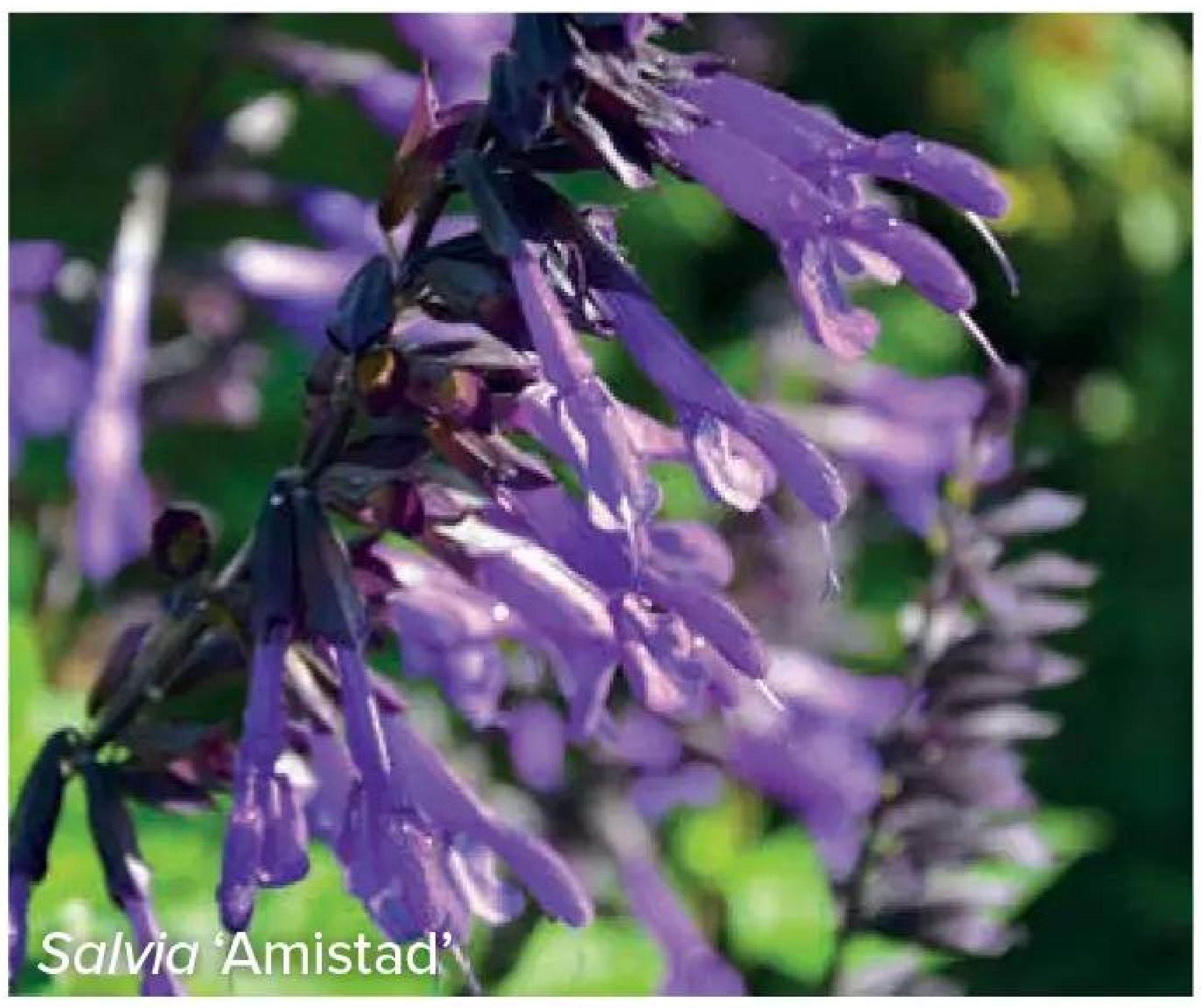
Top tips

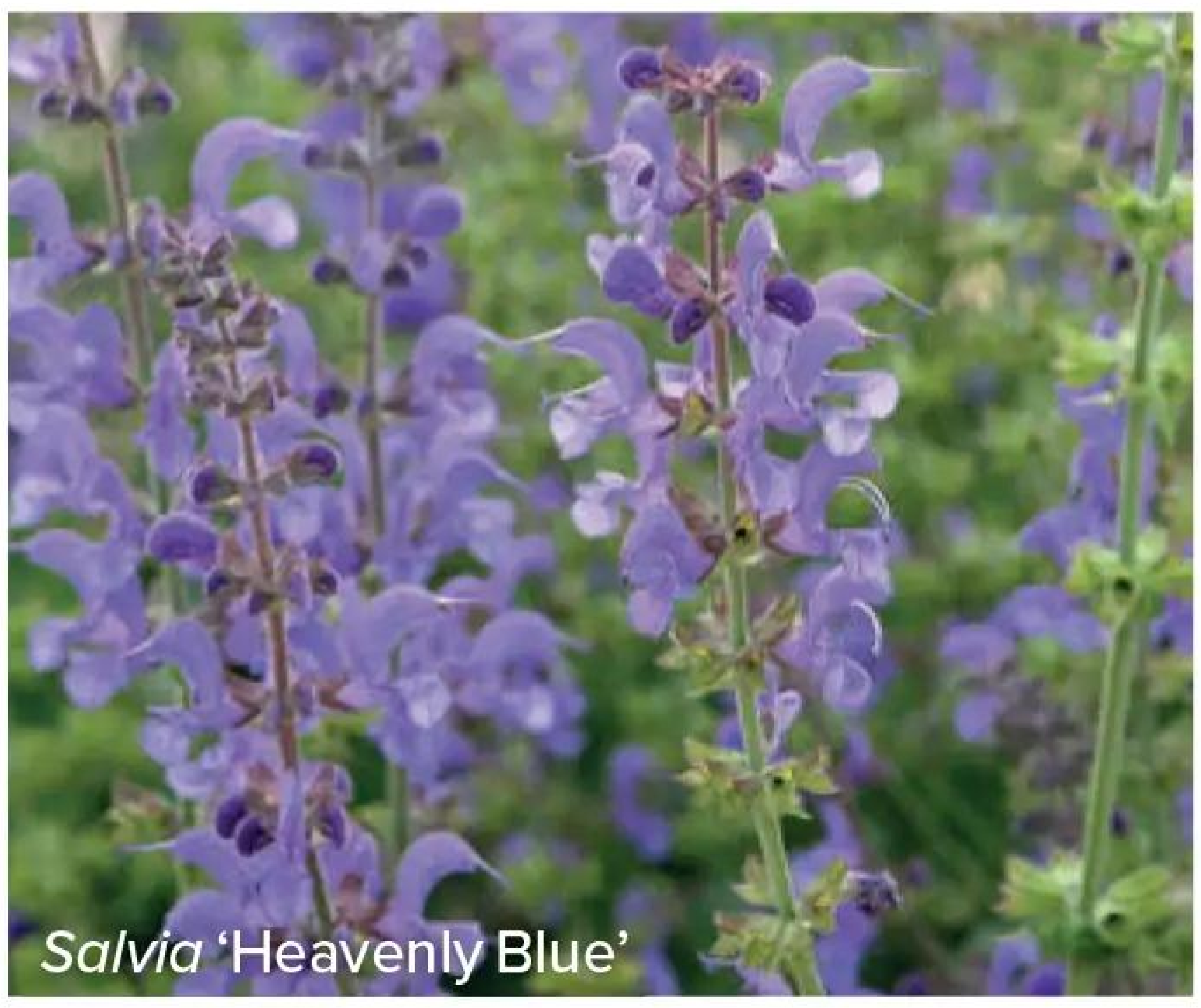
- Ensure well-draining soil to prevent root rot
- Remove spent flower spikes to encourage flowering into autumn.
- Cut back in early spring as new growth emerges

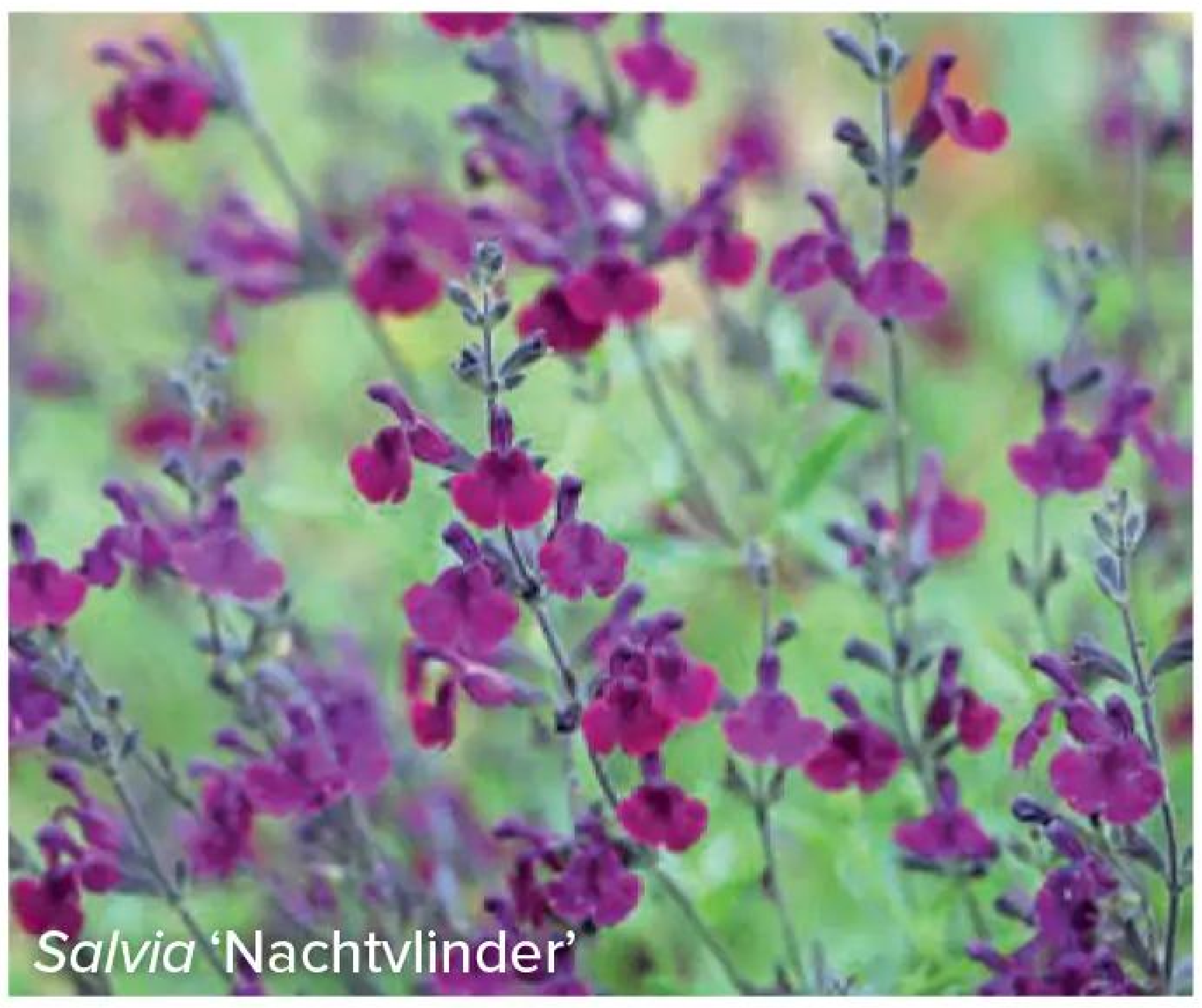
DIANA VIA ADOBE

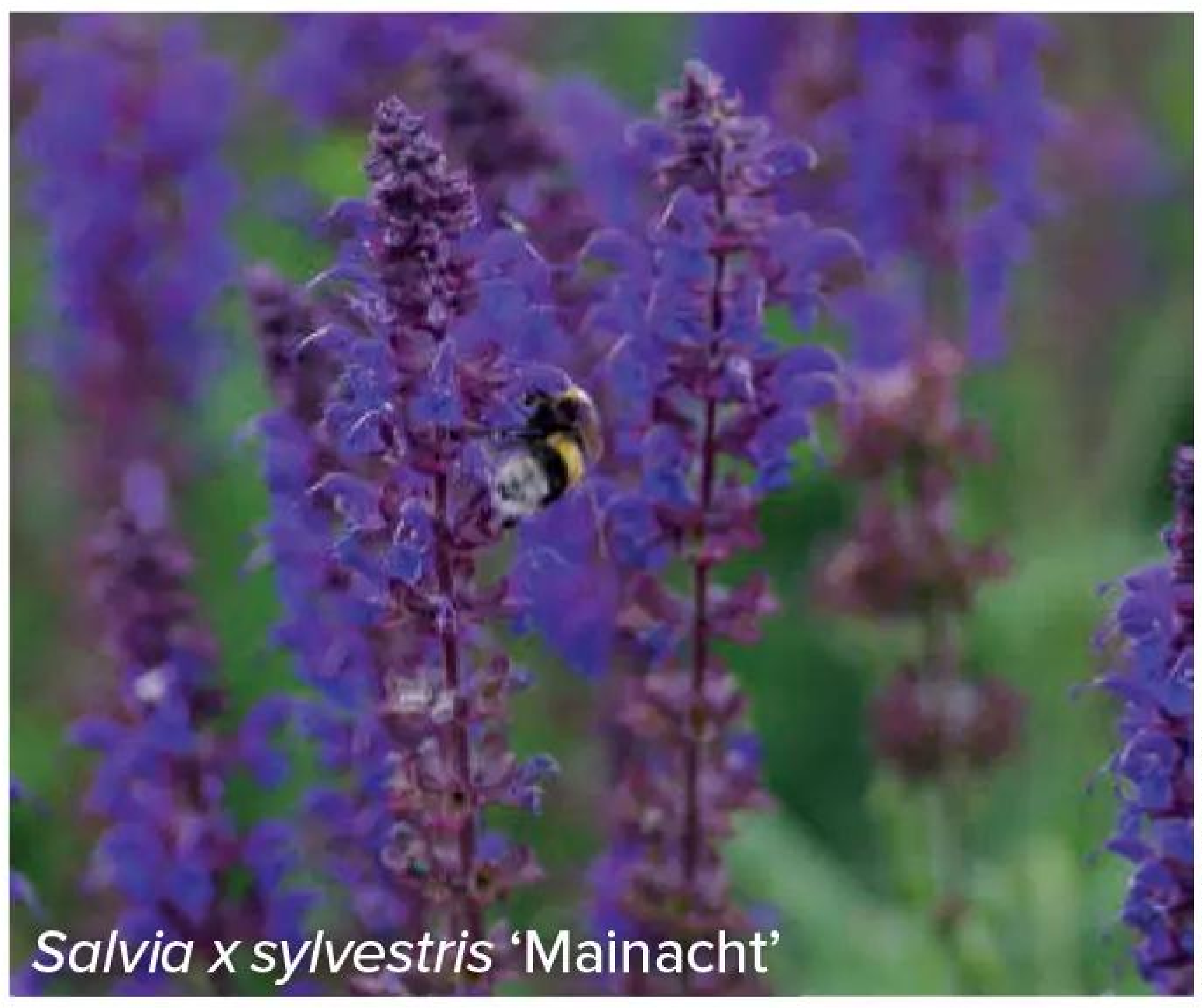

Salvia 'Hot Lips'


S. patens 'Cambridge Blue'

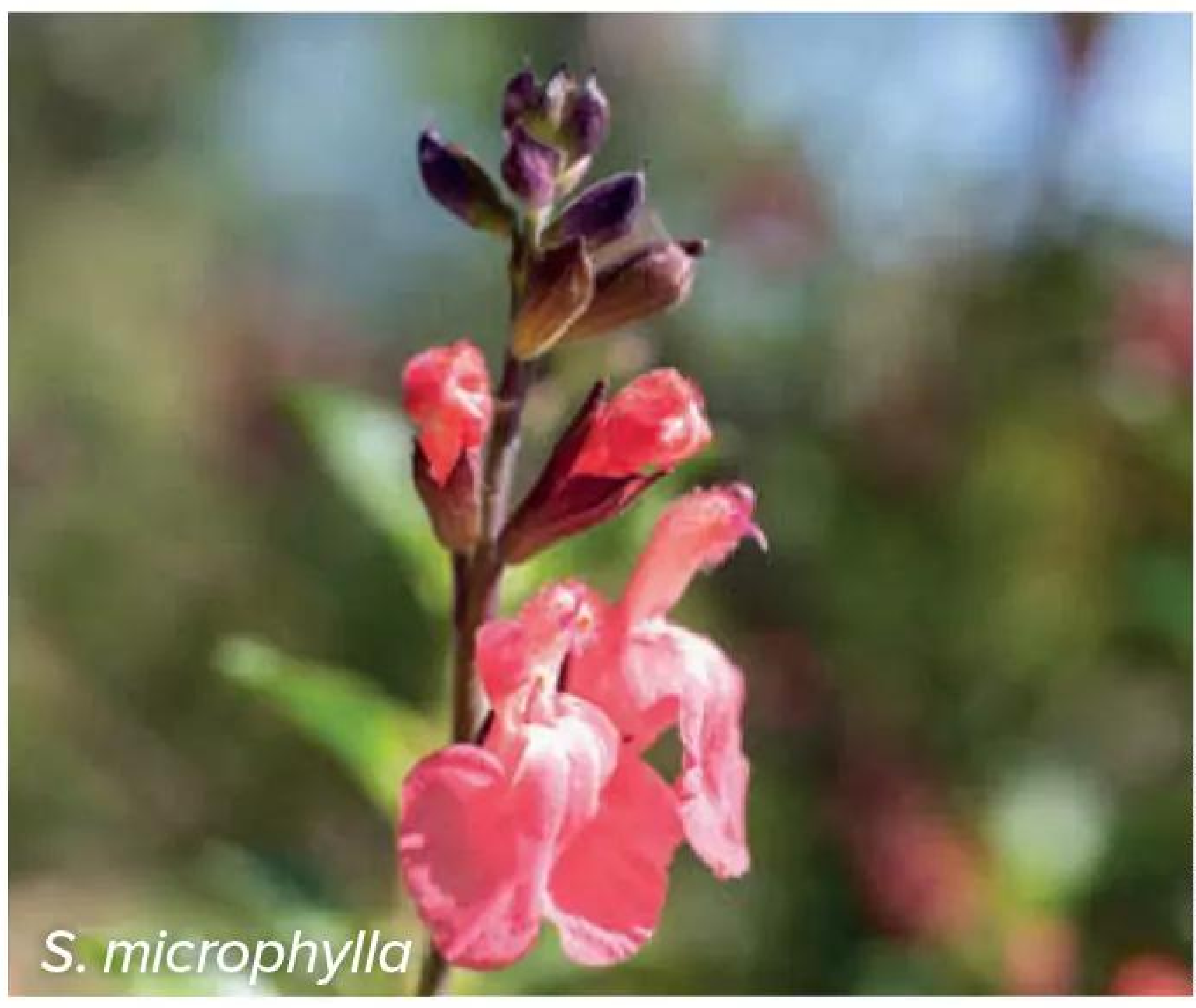

Salvia 'Amistad'


Salvia 'Heavenly Blue'


Salvia 'Nachtvlinder'

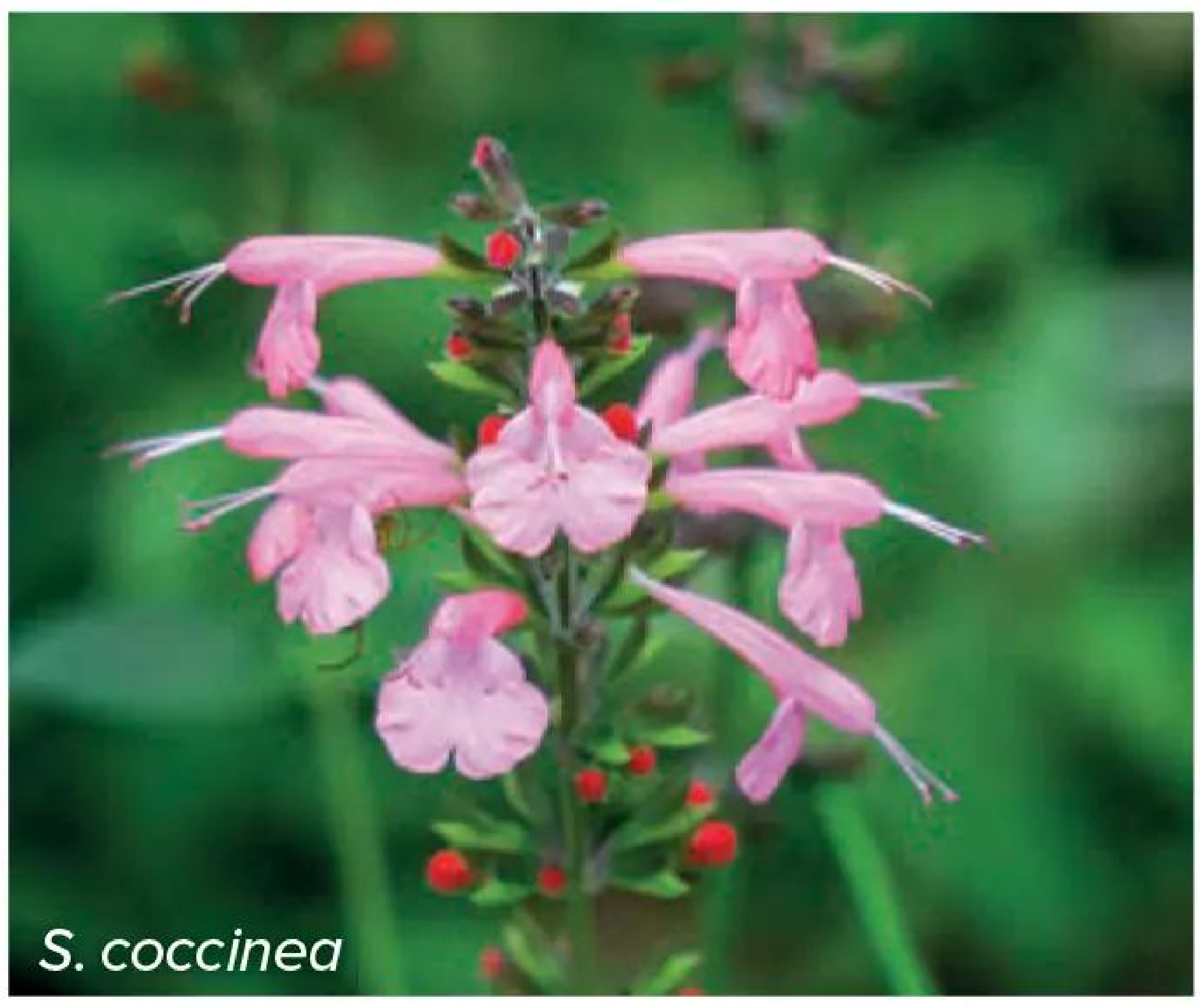

Salvia x sylvestris 'Mainacht'

SHUTTERSTOCK

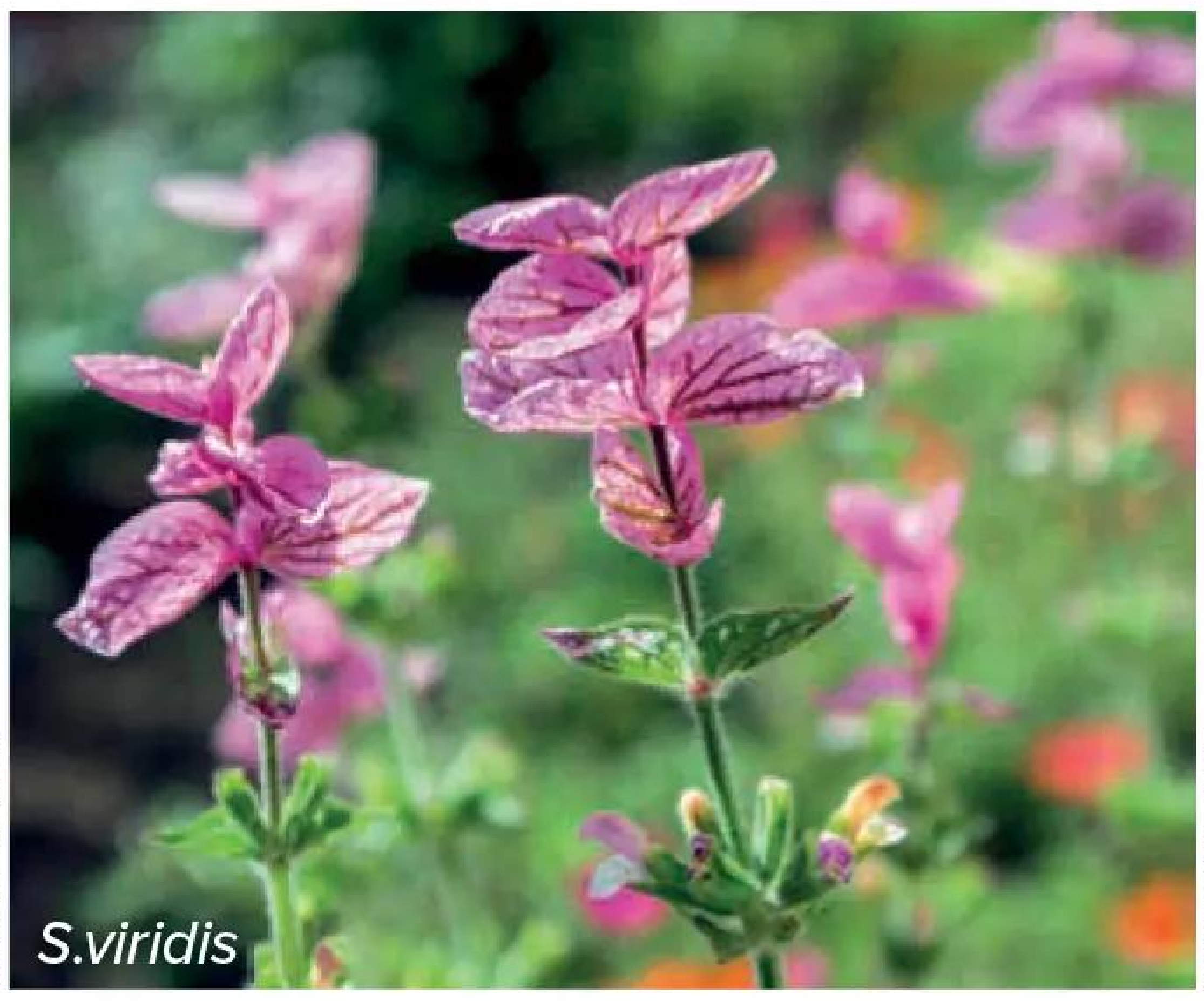

S. microphylla

DIANA VIA ADOBE

SHUTTERSTOCK


S. coccinea

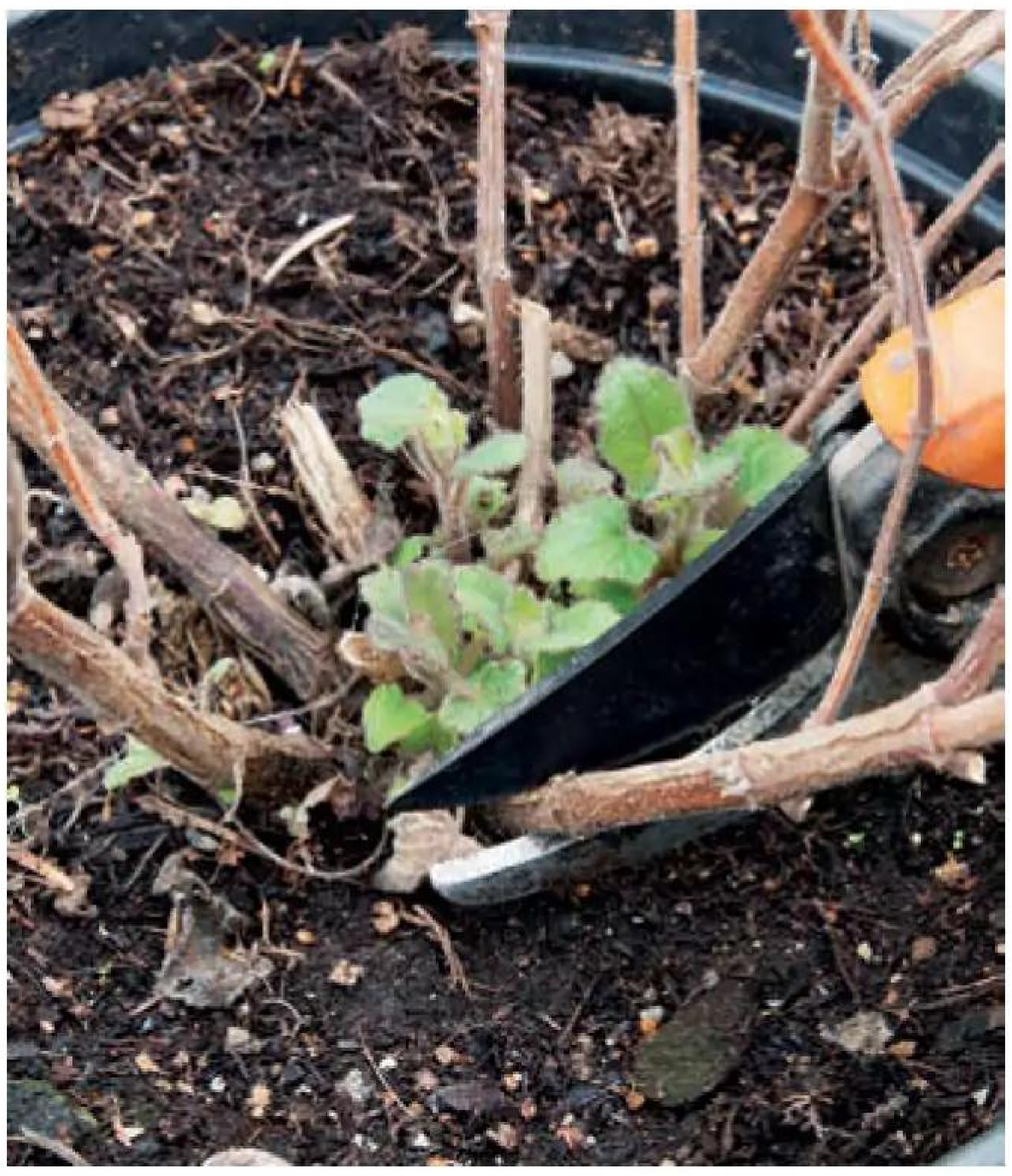
SHUTTERSTOCK


S.viridis

SHUTTERSTOCK

GROWING ADVICE

Salvias prefer slightly acidic to neutral soil (pH 6.0-7.0). Incorporate organic matter before planting to improve soil structure and fertility. While drought-tolerant once established, water deeply and regularly during their first growing season. After that, water only during prolonged dry spells. Salvias generally don't need heavy feeding. Apply a balanced, slow-release fertiliser in spring, or use a liquid feed monthly during the growing season. For tender varieties, provide winter protection with fleece or mulch, or lift and store tubers in frost-free conditions.


Salvias may look dead in the spring, but be patient, they'll come back!

Pests and diseases

Whiteflies can cluster under leaves. Control with insecticidal soap or encourage natural predators. Slugs and snails may damage young growth – use barriers or traps. Aphids can distort new growth – remove by hand or use a strong water spray.

Powdery mildew can cause a white powdery coating on leaves. Don't over-water or you may get root rot, or botrytis (grey mold). Improve air circulation, avoid overhead watering, remove affected parts and improve air circulation.

Peonies

Paeonia

Plant: autumn

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: type dependent -20°C.

Propagate: seed/ division/root cuttings

Beautiful blowsy flowers in stunning colours that are as perfect in vases as they are in borders

Peonies bring impact and drama to any garden. They explode between late May and July, giving borders that 'wow' factor. Once established, they flourish for decades, with their many, large, flamboyant blooms in a magical range of colours, frequently with a beautiful scent and/or finely cut foliage. Peony leaves are highly variable, and a specimen from one location can appear very different from another, even though they are of the same species.

'Molly the Witch'

This is the nickname given to a beautiful peony with lemon-yellow flowers. It originates from the Caucasus Mountains (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Dagestan), and was discovered in 1900. And the reason for its curious nickname? Well, the botanist who discovered it was a Polish explorer named Ludwik Mlokosiewicz.

The plant has been given the scientific name *Paeonia daurica* subsp. *mlokosewitschii* – but Brits of the early 20th century couldn't be bothered to learn how to say it properly! 'Molly the witch' was as close as some of them could get, and the name caught on.

This is an herbaceous perennial peony to 2ft (60cm) or so tall, with broad, bluish-green, divided foliage. Its blooms, in mid to late spring, are bowl-shaped, and lemon-yellow with deep yellow stamens.

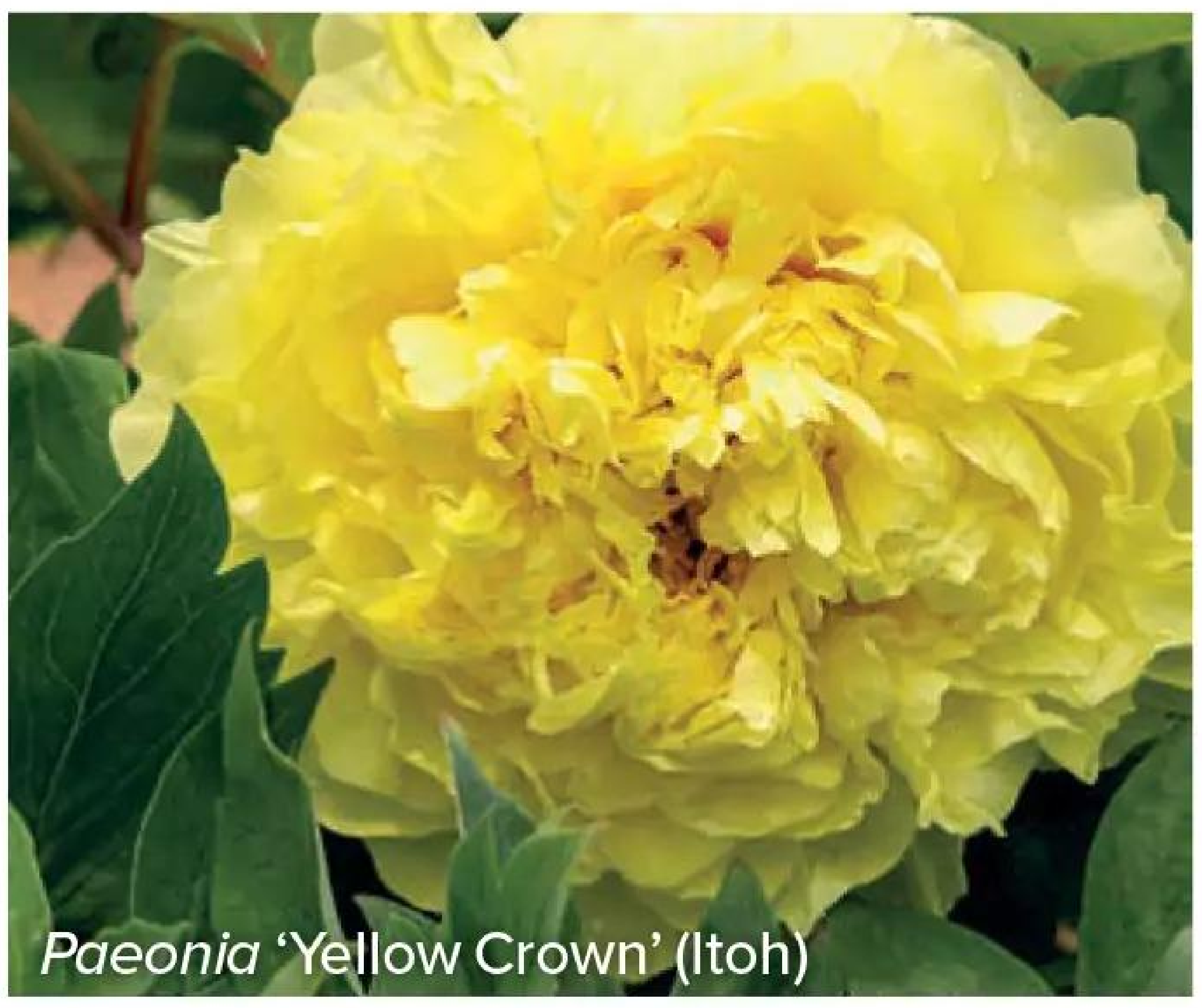
Did you know...

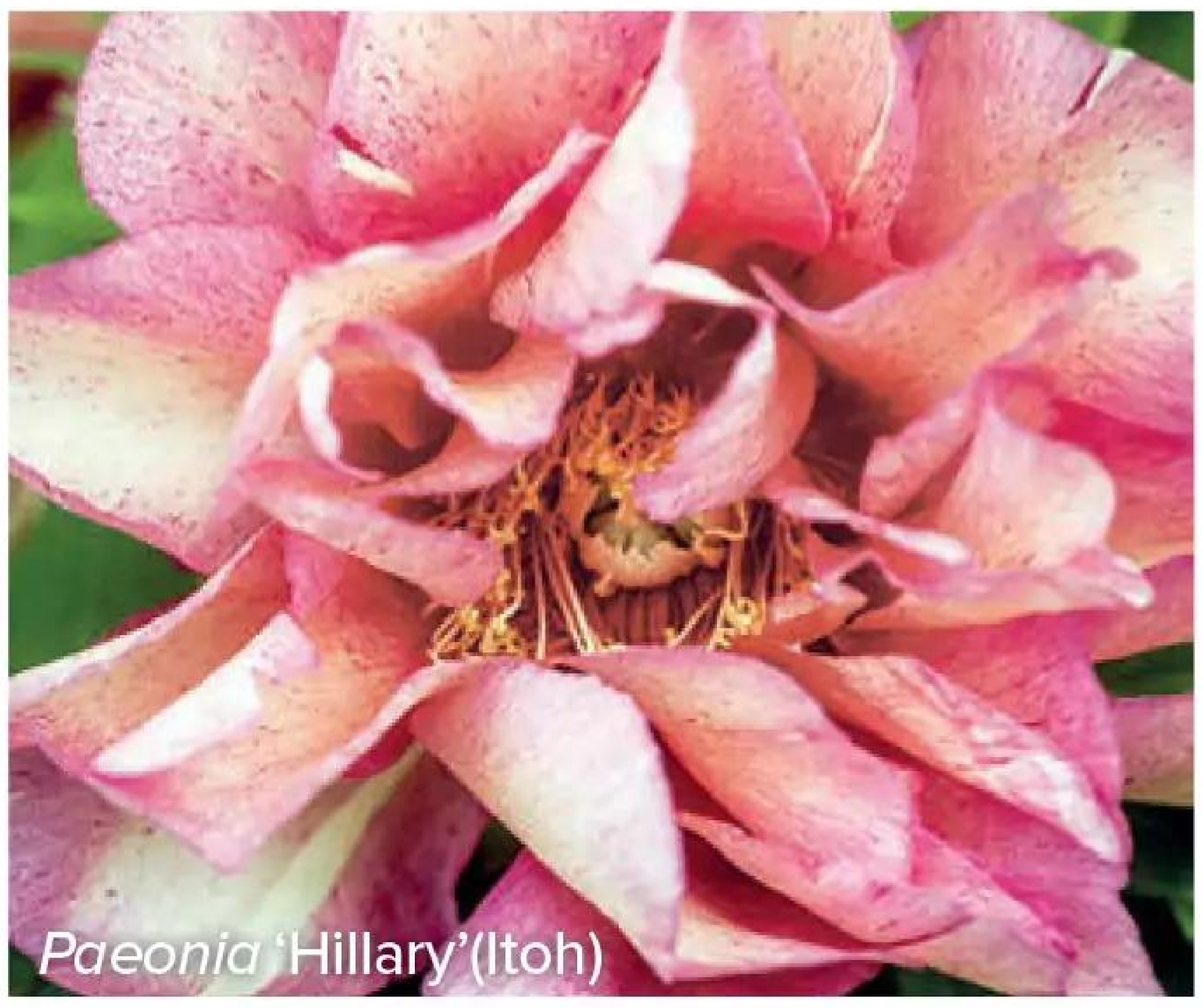
There are three types of peony:

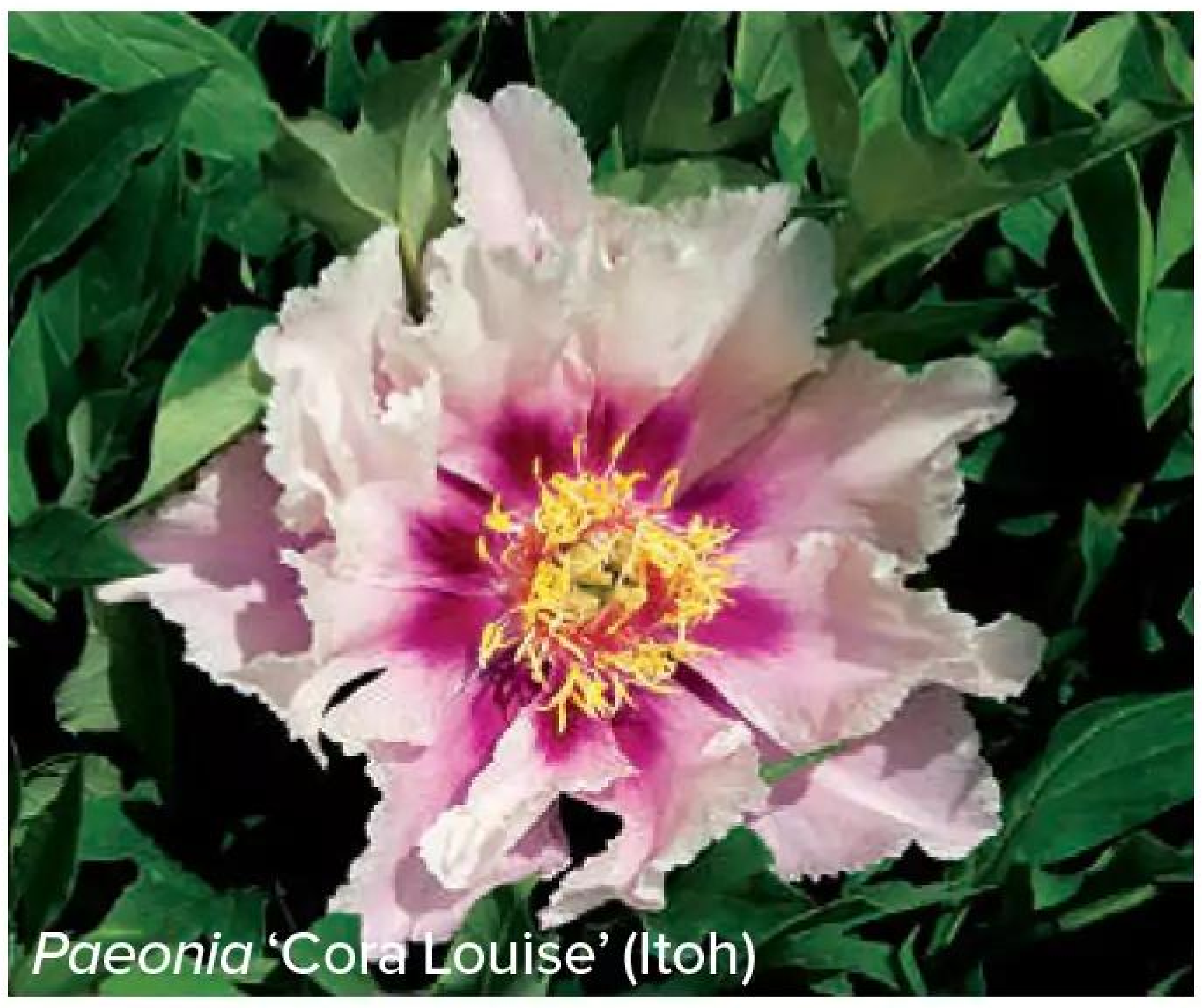
- **Herbaceous:** Die back to the ground each winter
- **Tree:** Woody shrubs that lose their leaves but keep their stems year-round
- **Intersectional (Itoh):** Hybrids between herbaceous and tree peonies

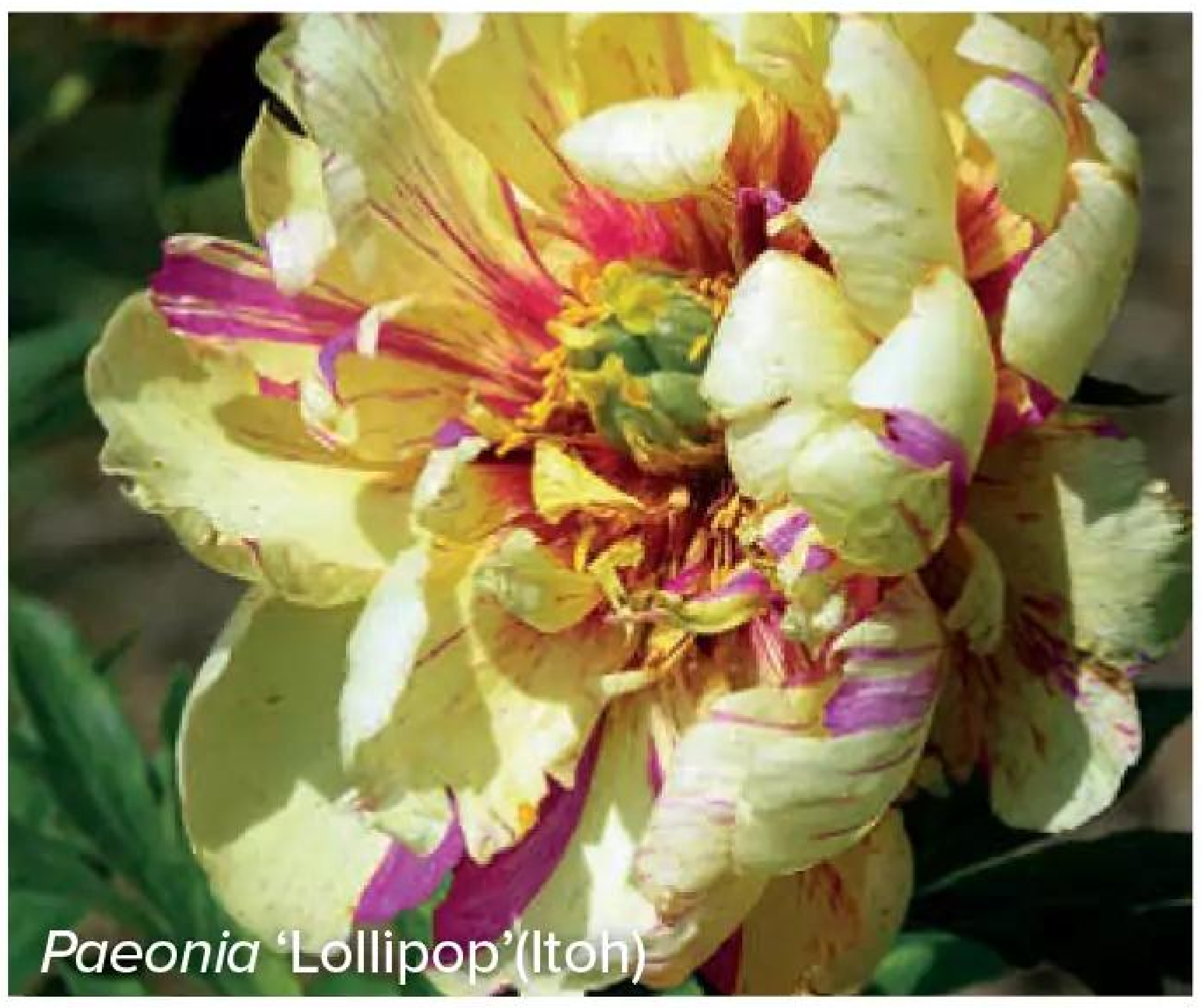
Top tips

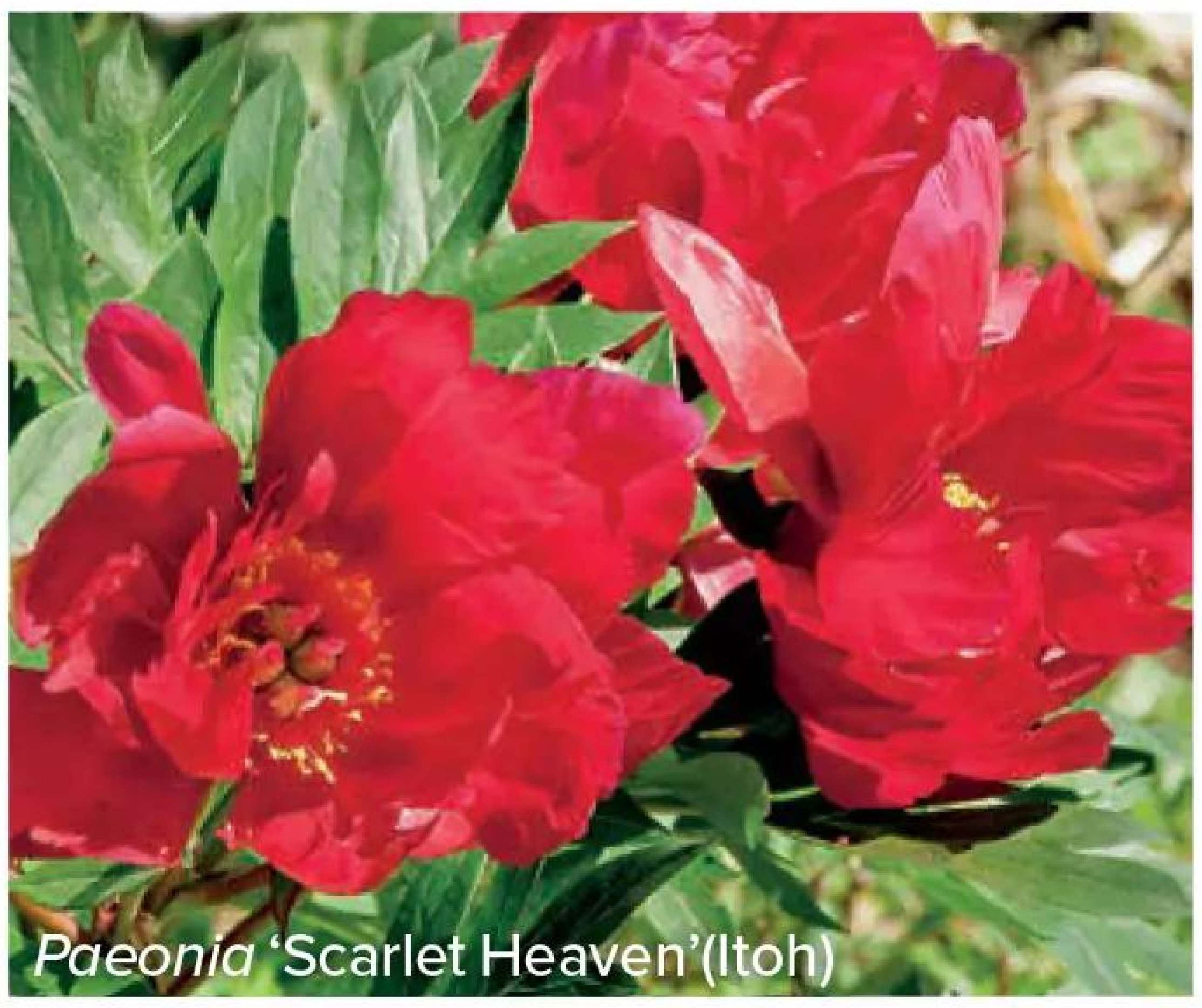
- Itoh peonies are hybrids between herbaceous and tree peonies, with good resistance to peony wilt disease
- Plant in an open position and not too close to nearby plants where competing roots may interfere with growth

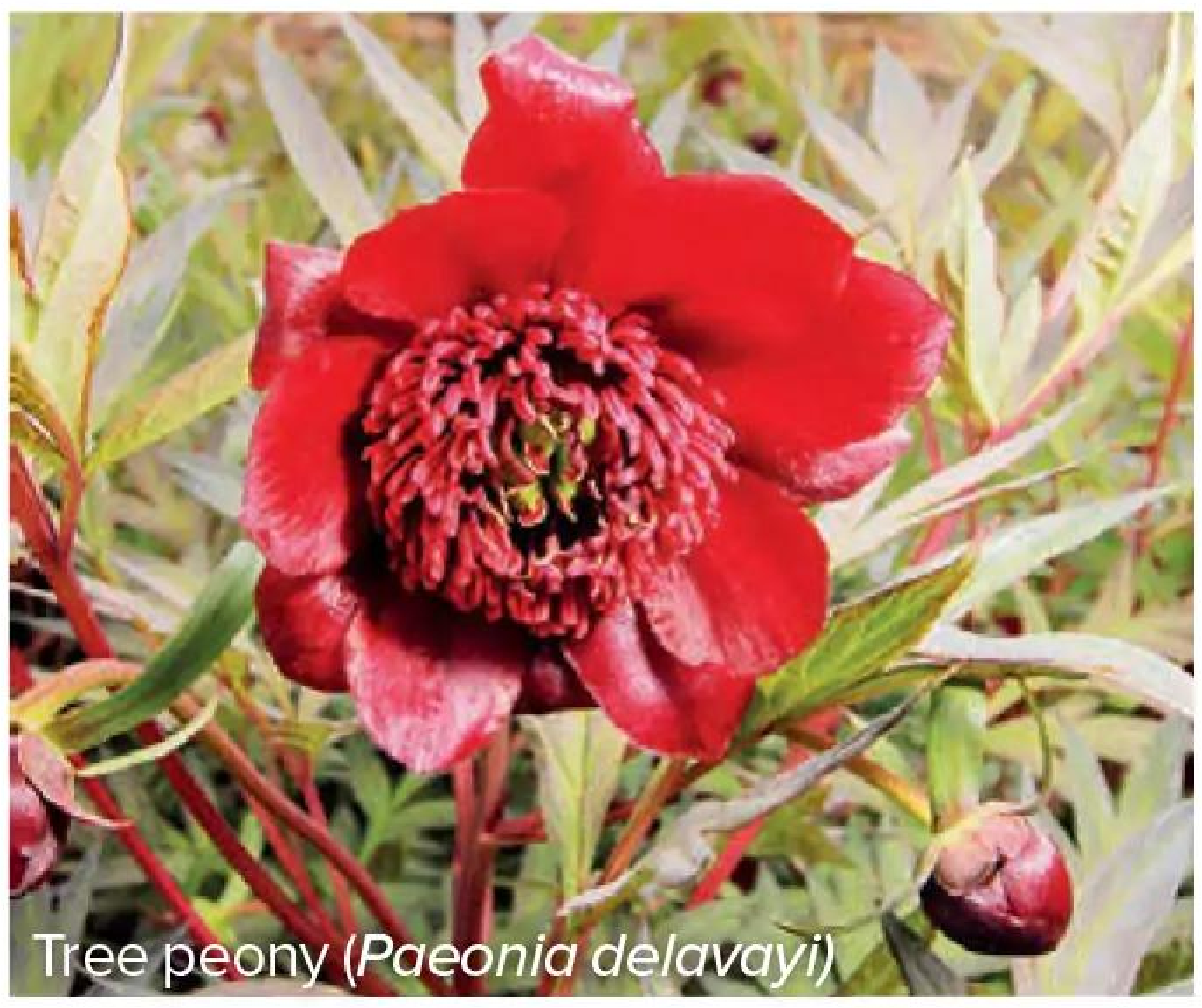

Paeonia 'Yellow Crown' (Itoh)

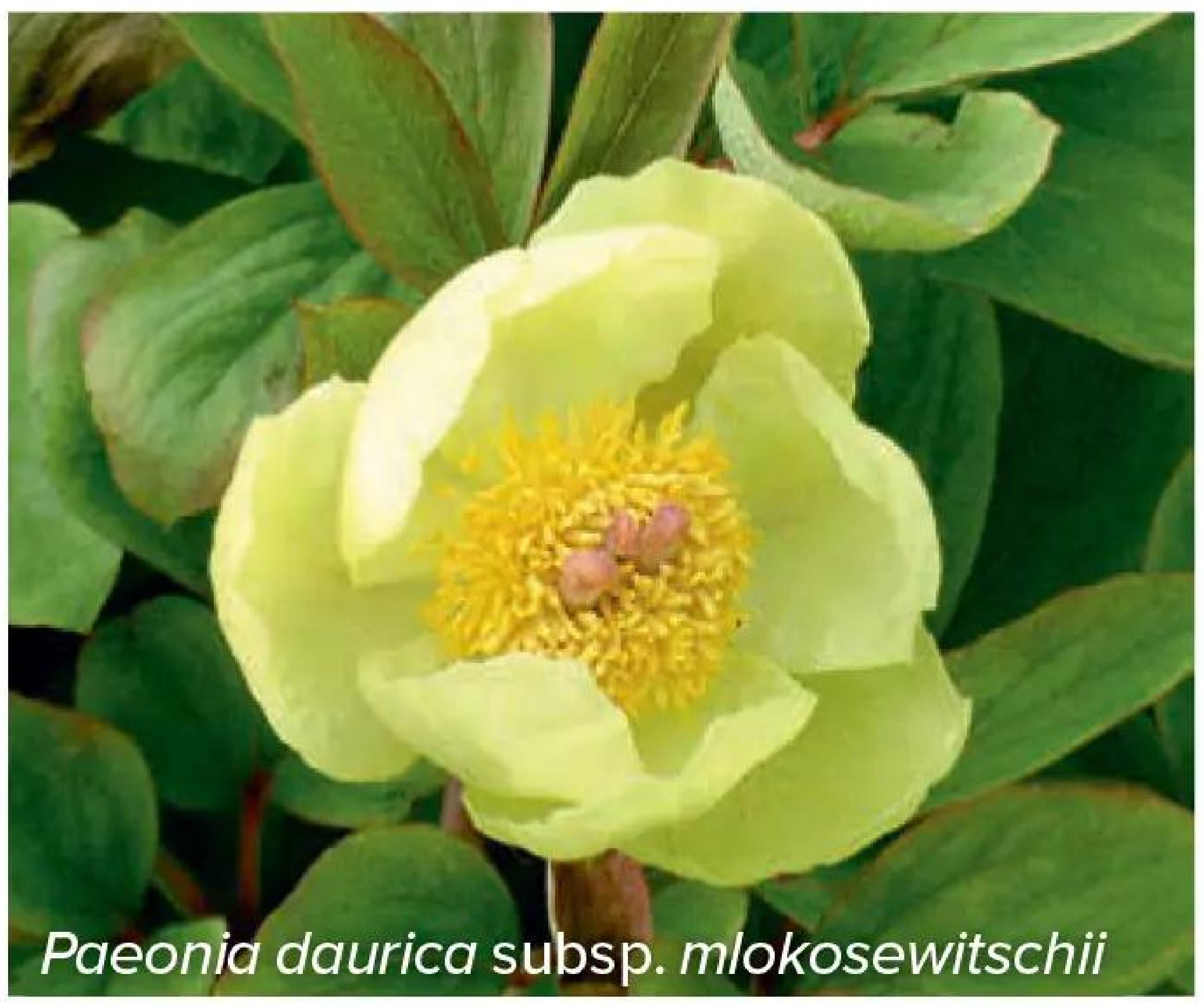

Paeonia 'Hillary'(Itoh)

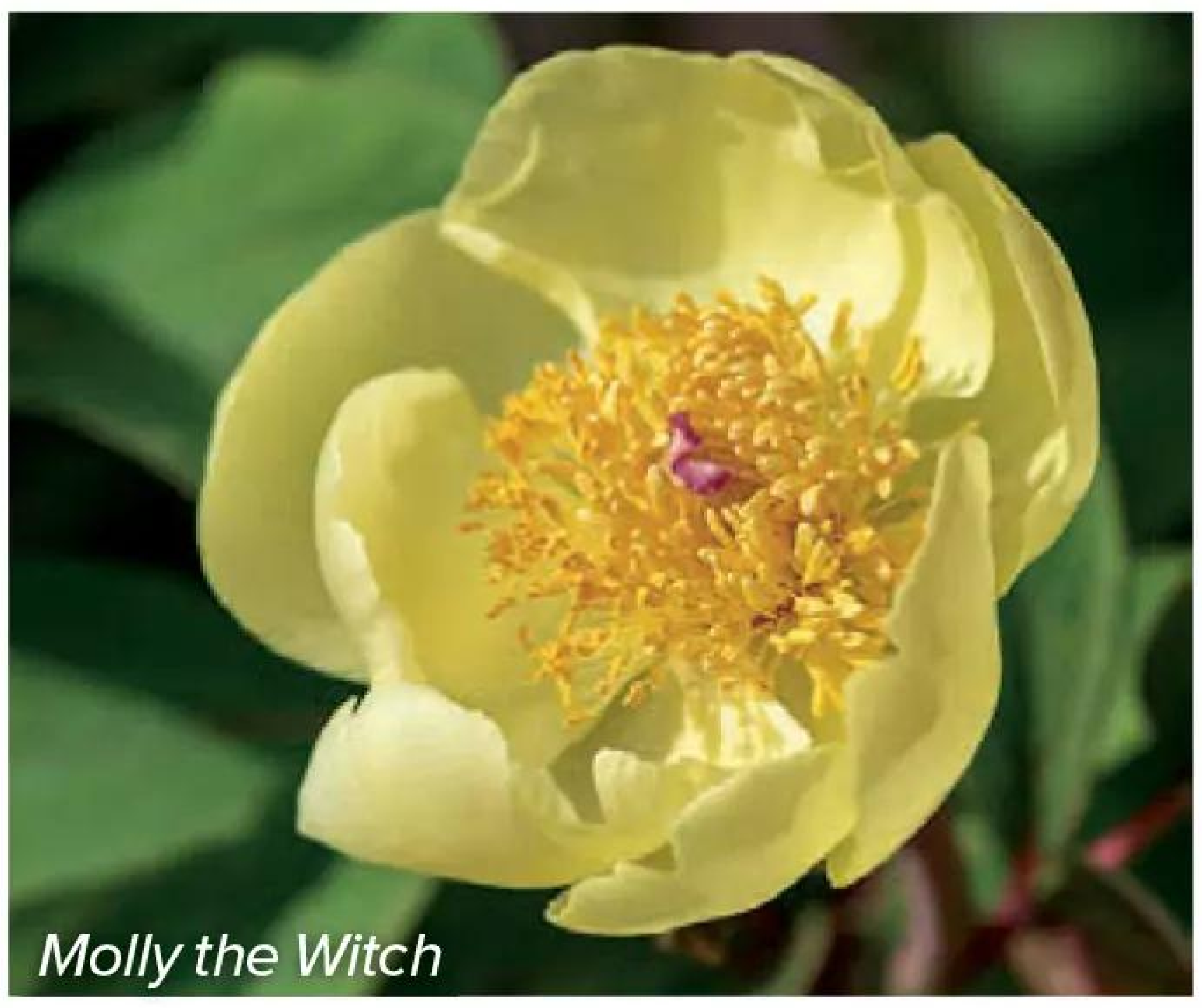

Paeonia 'Cora Louise' (Itoh)

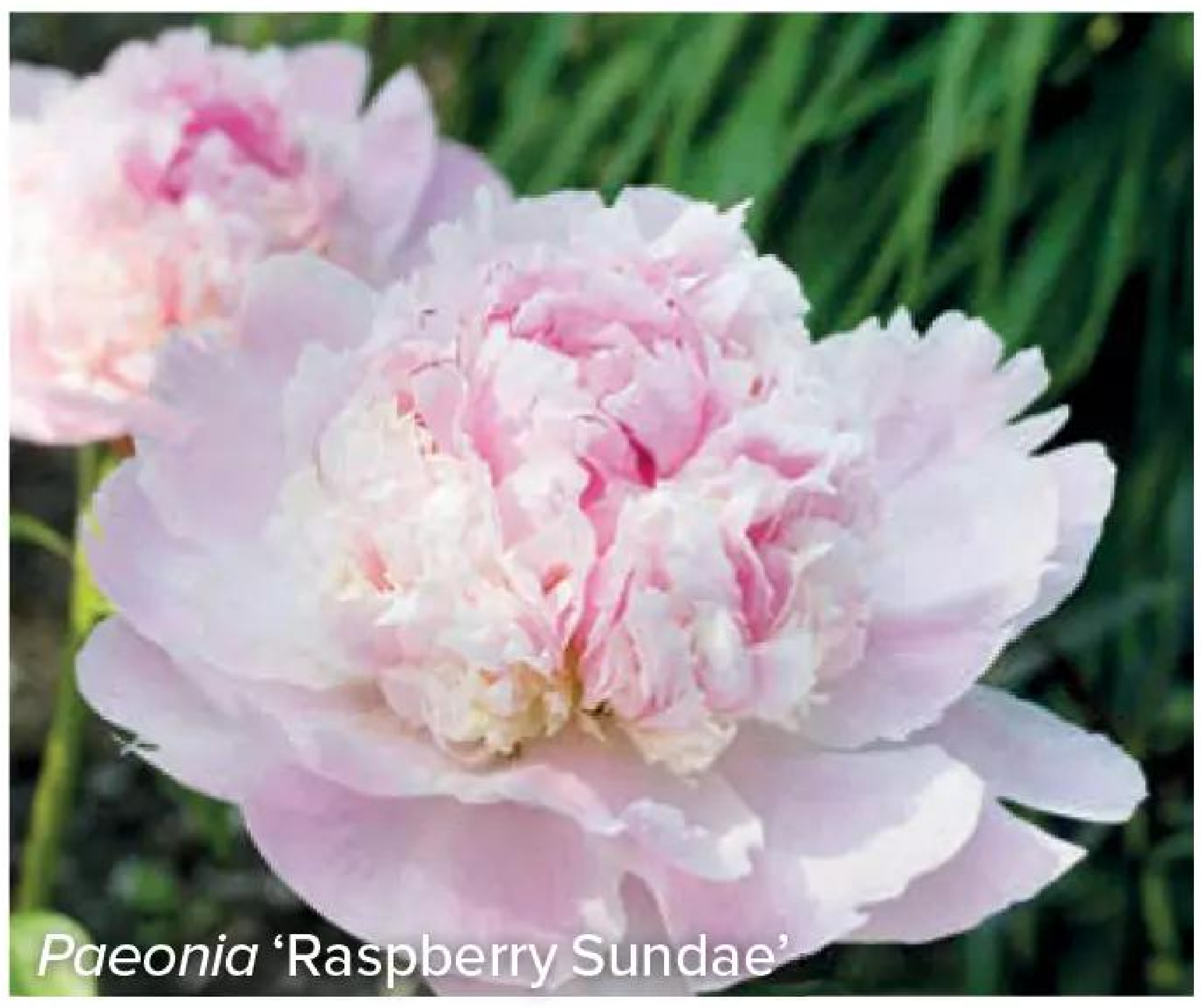

Paeonia 'Lollipop'(Itoh)


Paeonia 'Scarlet Heaven'(Itoh)


Tree peony (*Paeonia delavayi*)


Paeonia daurica subsp. *mlokosewitschii*


Molly the Witch


Paeonia 'Raspberry Sundae'

GROWING ADVICE

Although they can be grown in sun, peony flowers always look better and last longer in cool places, between shrubs or beneath light overhead shade. Grow in a humus-rich, free-draining soil and water well in the first year. All peonies take time to make a substantial rootstock, but each year you can expect more flowering stems.

If you see peony wilt (caused by an airborne botrytis fungus), cut away infected material promptly and dispose of it away from the garden.

Propagation

The ripe, black seeds are collected in late summer and sown fresh. To divide existing plants, lift and divide while dormant, between November and early March. Always ensure each section contains enough roots and at least three eyes (buds). Replant in a good-sized hole, but not too deep, ensuring the eyes are no more than a couple of inches below the surface.

Root cuttings can be taken from the trimmings when dividing. Lay them horizontally in rows in a large shallow tray of compost before covering with gravel.

Contrary to popular belief, peonies can be moved! Mature plants – either herbaceous or tree peonies – can be generally moved in the autumn, but may take up to three years to recover fully. Herbaceous peonies must be planted so that their crown is about 2in (5cm) below the surface of the soil. This ensures that the buds are sufficiently chilled – something they need to develop properly. After transplanting, feed a balanced fertiliser in the spring.

Lupins

Lupinus

Plant: spring
Position: full sun
Hardiness: to -15°C
Propagate: seed/division

The spires of lupins are a welcome sight in early summer and, when used well, are really eye-catching

Lupins certainly make their mark, and some people think they are too colourful but a well-grown lupin in the right place can be an absolute wonder, and if you don't like big and bold perennial lupins, there are plenty of options with a softer look.

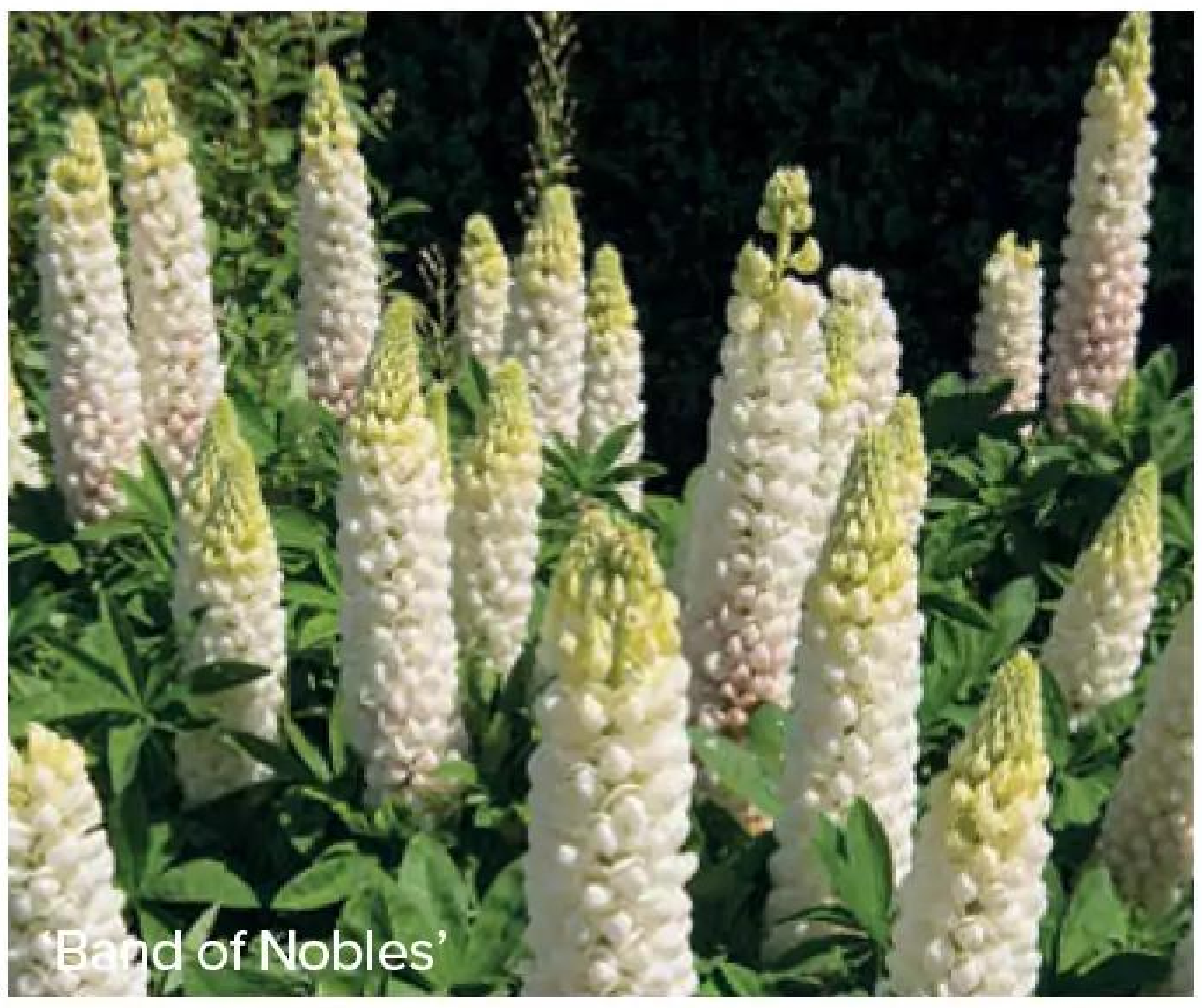
Hardy perennial lupins are one of the few flowers to come in every colour of the rainbow, as well as an array of bright bicolours. The pea-like flowers are also fragrant and the bees love them. Choose a variety that really catches your attention and grow a single dramatic clump of it, surrounded by flowers that open before and afterwards, as in that way they can stand gloriously alone. Alternatively, create a stunning June and July border featuring lupins, Oriental poppies, tall bearded irises and hardy geraniums.

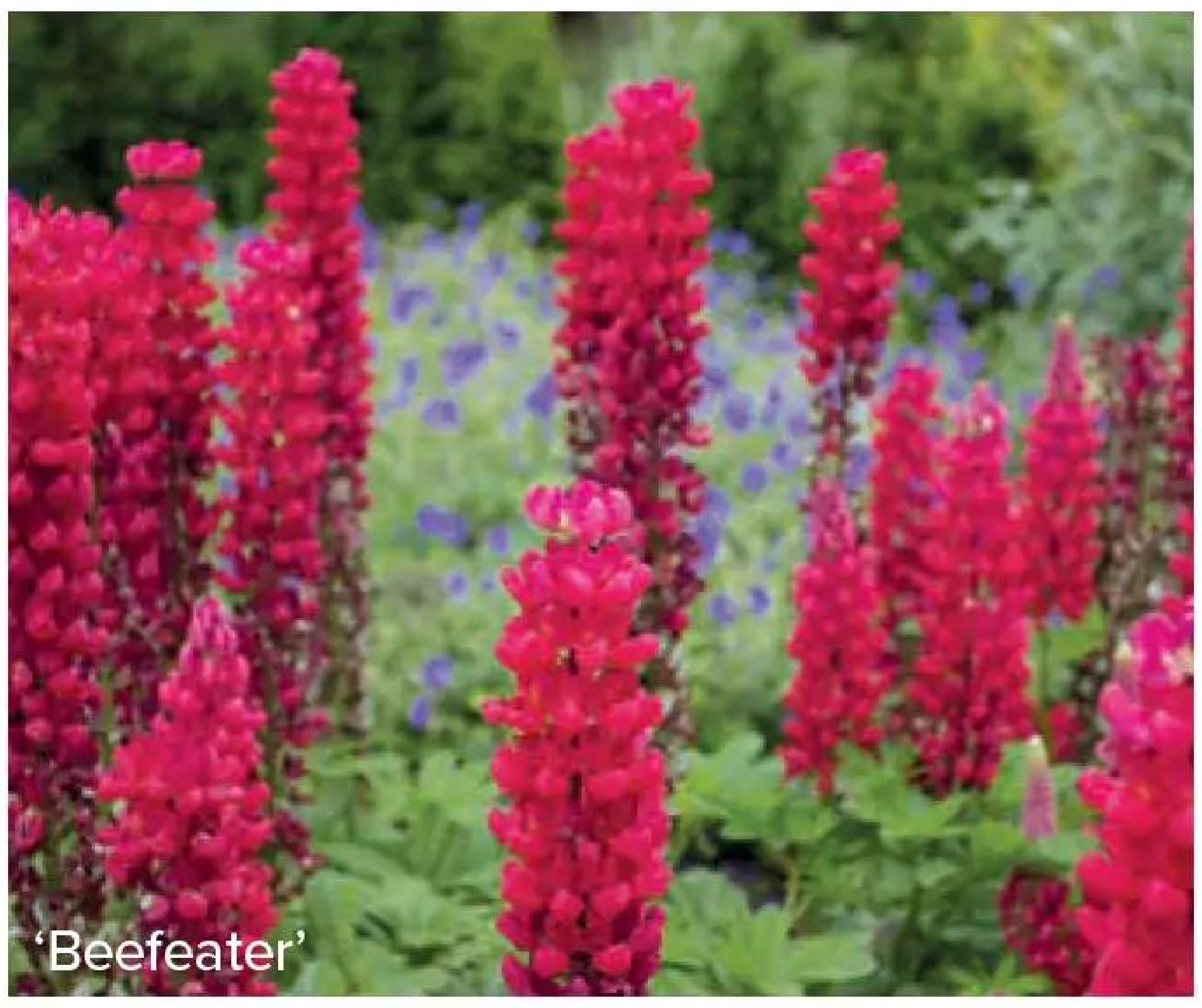
There are other lupins. Shrubby *Lupinus arboreus* grows wild in the US on the sand dunes of California – a big clue to the conditions it likes. Over a long season, the rounded evergreen bushes are covered in bright-yellow spikes of fragrant flowers. It's a fine plant for new gardens as it very quickly makes a colourful bush.

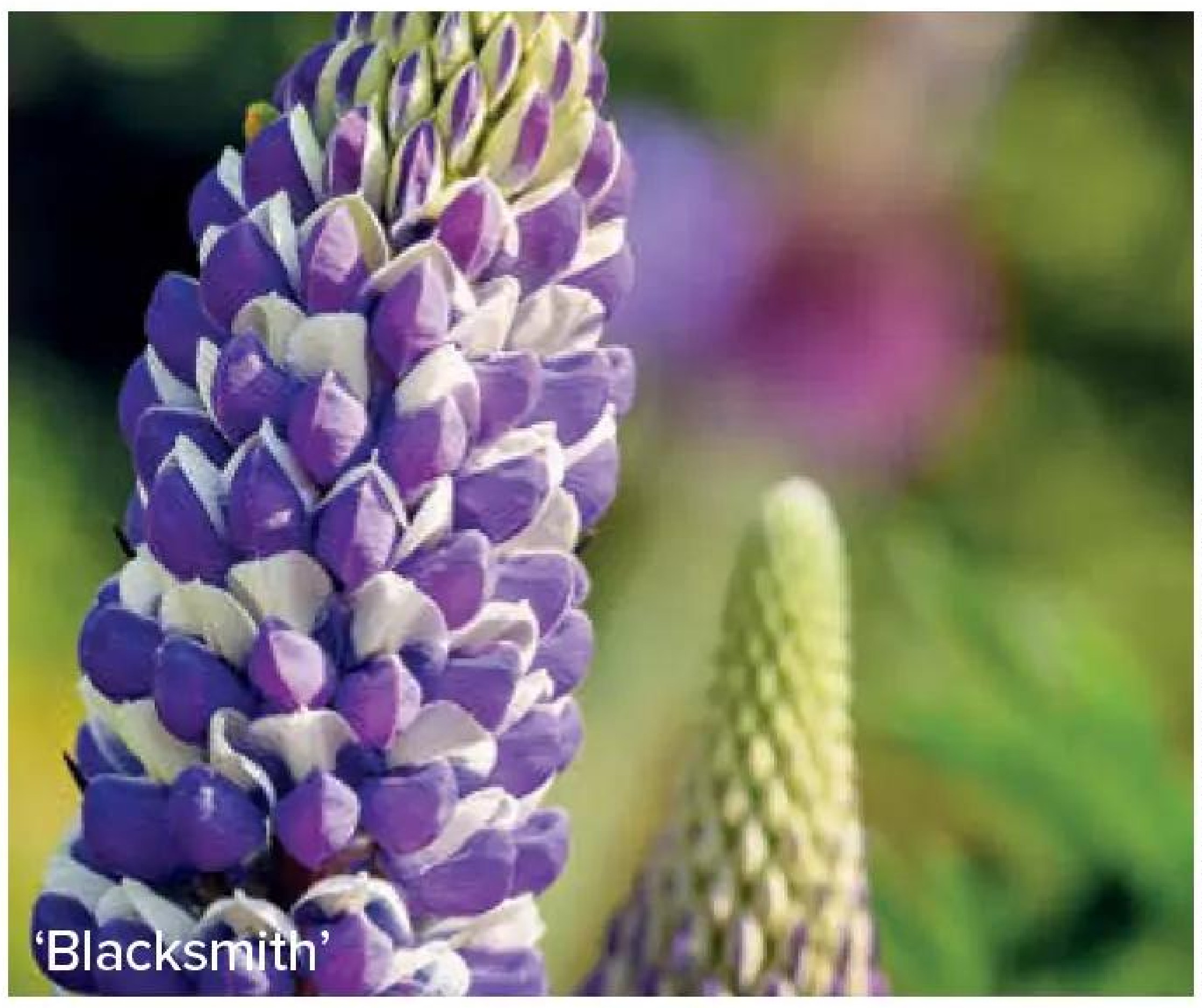
Top tips

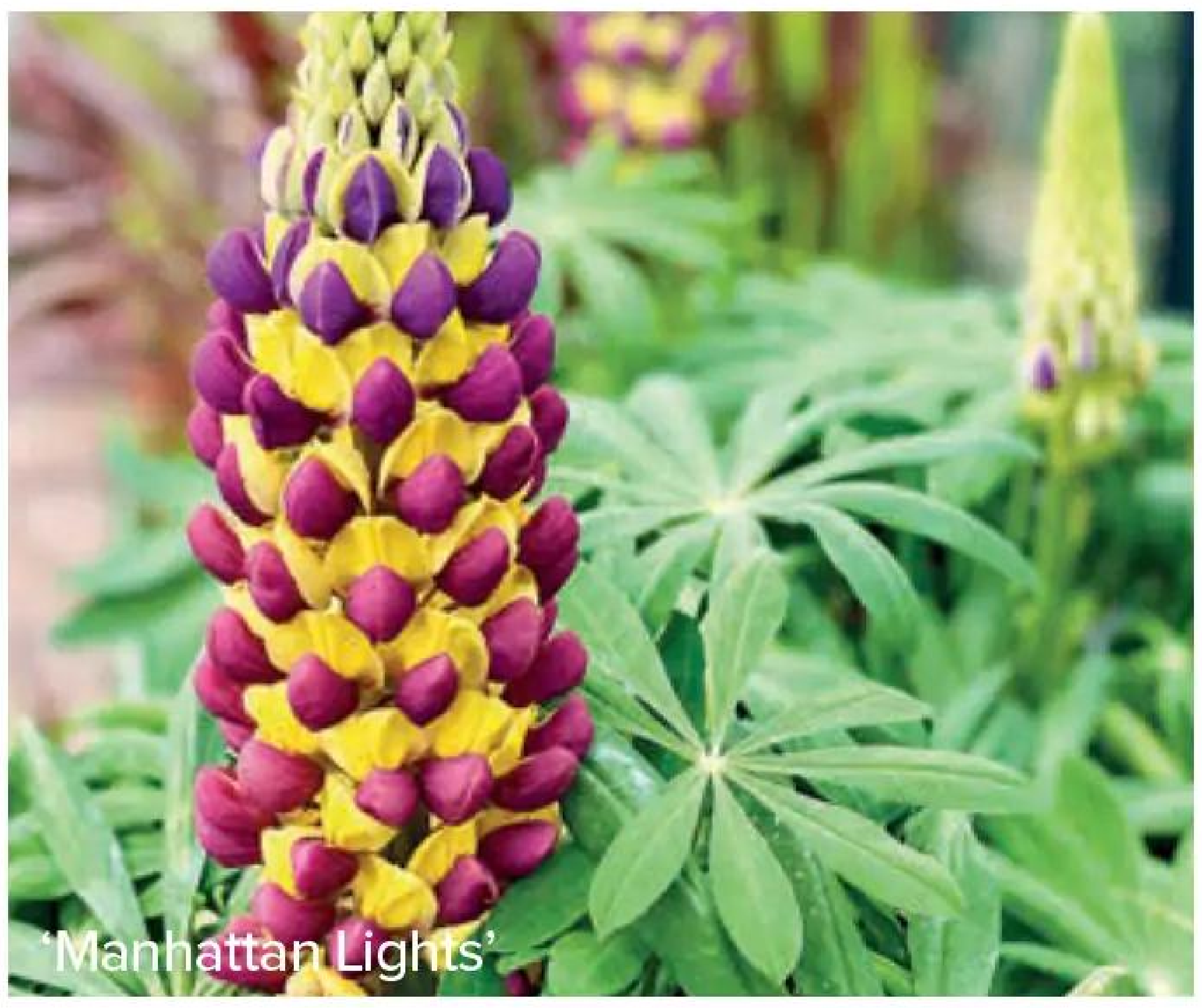
- Lupins don't do well in heavy clay or waterlogged conditions
- Tall varieties may need staking to prevent wind damage
- Sow seeds directly in the garden in spring or autumn, or start indoors and transplant

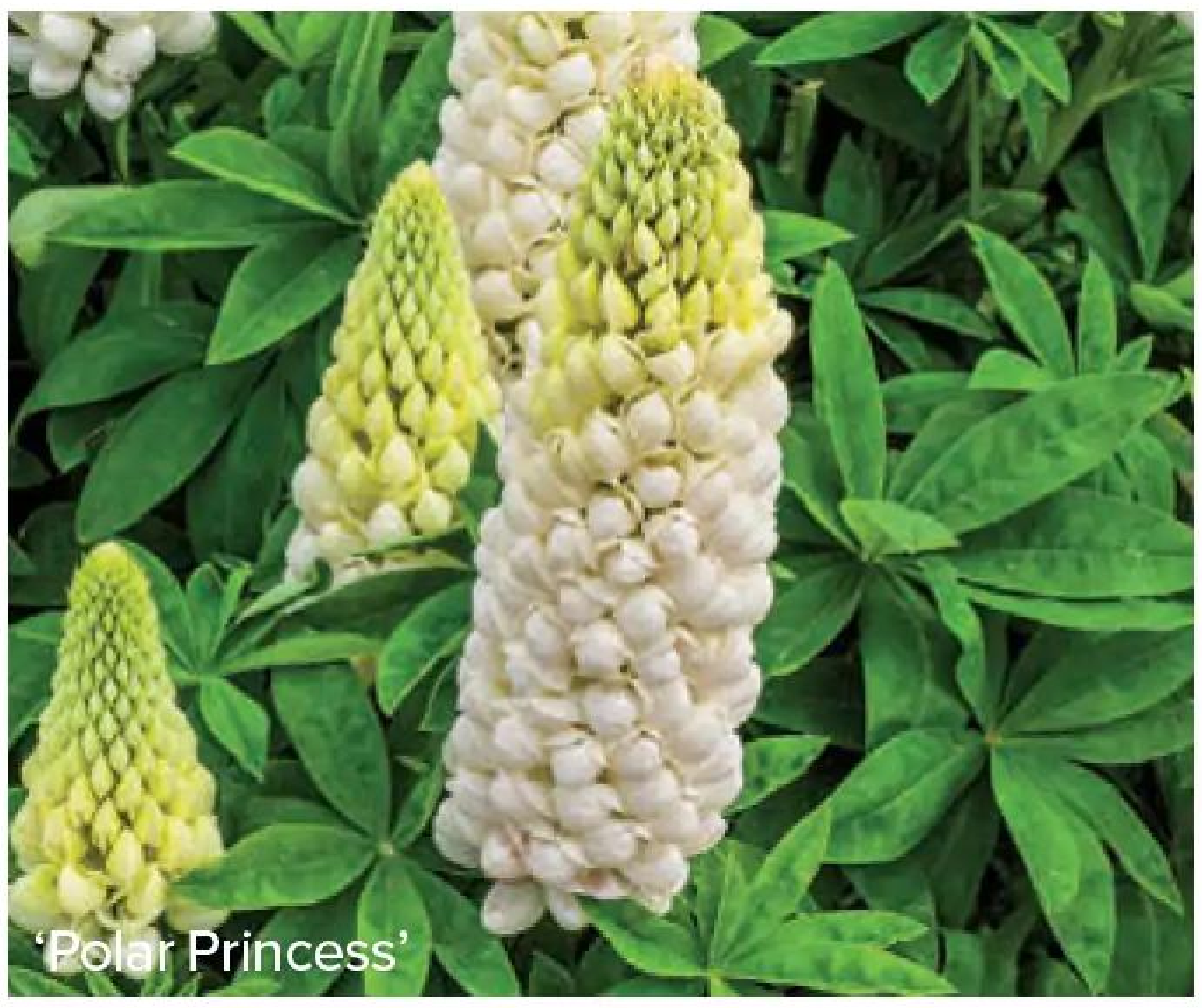
ALL PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

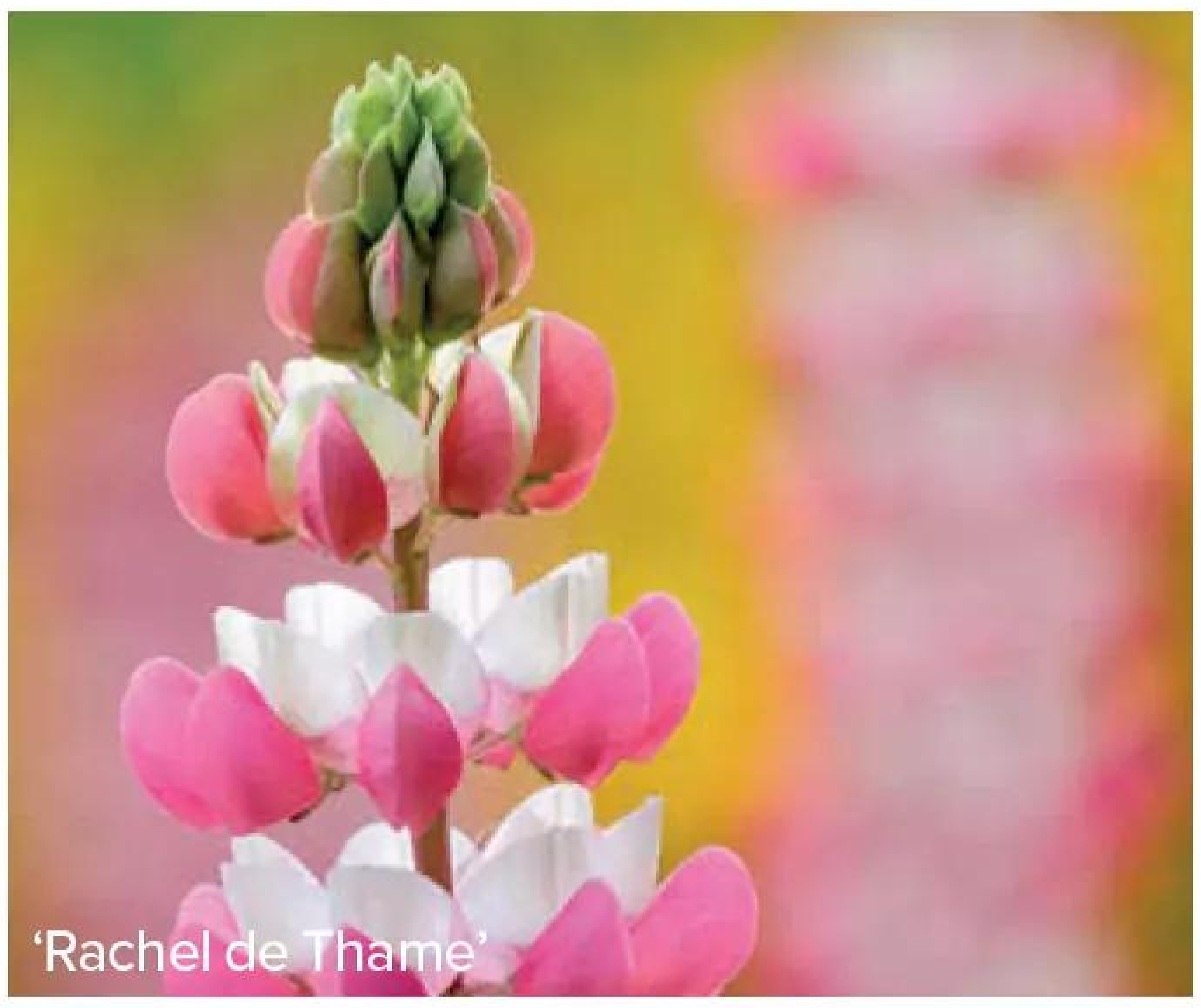

'Band of Nobles'

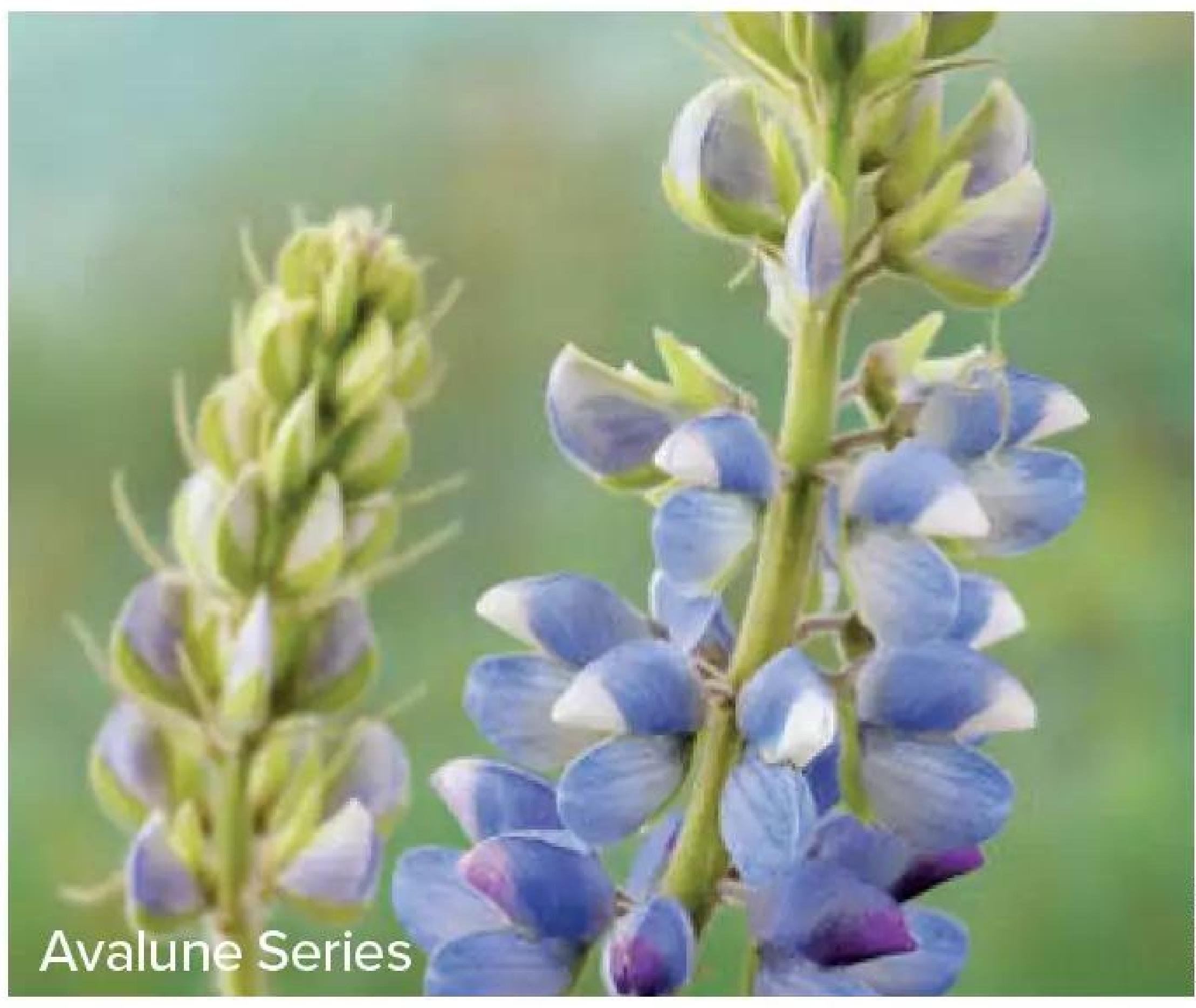

'Beefeater'


'Blacksmith'

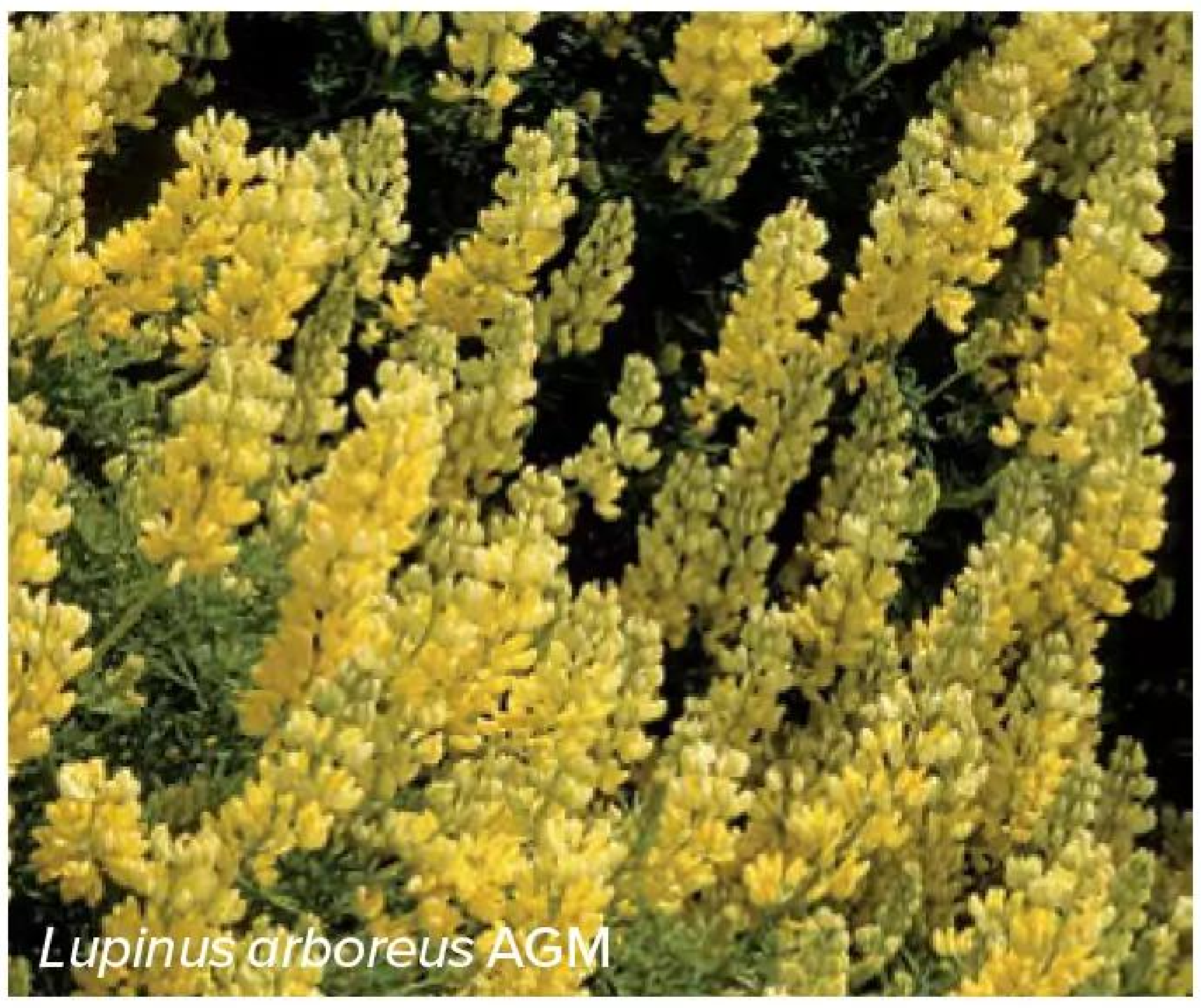

'Manhattan Lights'

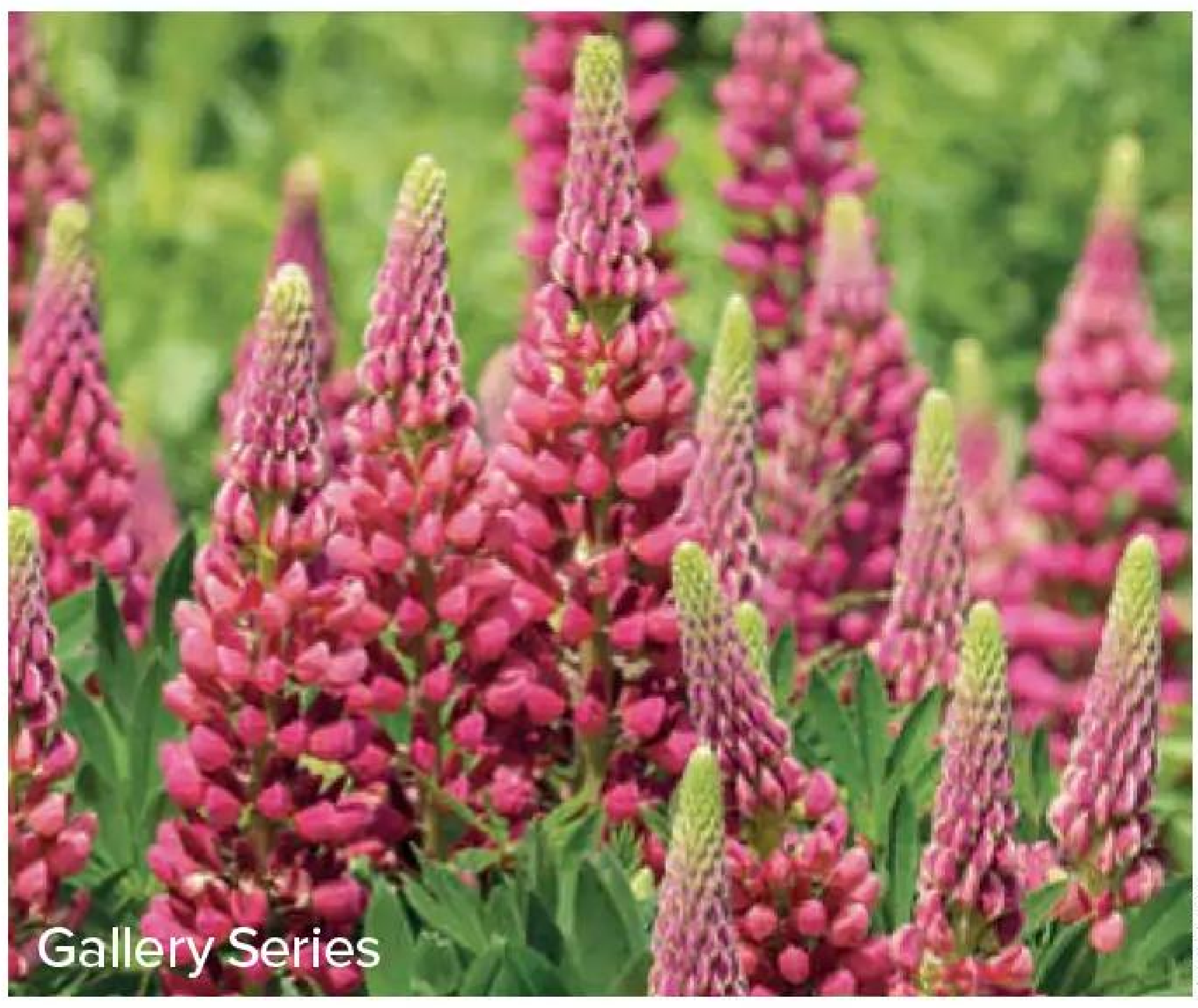

'Polar Princess'


'Rachel de Thame'


Avalune Series

ALAMY


Lupinus arboreus AGM


Gallery Series

ALAMY

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Planting:** All lupins enjoy full sun and good drainage. Plant in spring and support with canes and string, or with grid supports.

✿ **Seeds:** Sow in warmth, in spring, in individual pots. Move into 3in (7½cm) pots and plant out after all risk of frost has passed.

✿ **Division:** Lift and divide carefully in early spring; do not break them up into small pieces.

✿ **Grow with:** Lupins work well with other cottage garden plants like delphiniums and foxgloves.

✿ **Care** Cut back foliage after flowering and mulch around the base.

Garden Fertiliser

Plant out after all risk of frost has passed. Lupins fix nitrogen from the air into the soil once their roots have developed, but give young plants a boost with fertiliser when you plant them

Pests and diseases

Lupins have their very own huge fat grey aphids. These should be dealt with ruthlessly as they transmit viral diseases.

Penstemon

Plantaginaceae

Plant:
March-May

Position:
full sun

Hardiness:
-15°C to -20°C

Propagate:
cuttings/division

Plant breeders have shaken up the old-fashioned penstemon, and given it a new lease of life

Penstemons have been favoured by cottage gardeners for more than a century. They were deemed to be colourful, long-flowering and undemanding, and this last point was accepted because, even though penstemons were known to be perennials, they were mainly used as summer bedding, with plants pulled up and discarded in autumn.

In recent years, breeding work in penstemons has exploded. This, and their informal habit, has made them popular with contemporary gardeners, and some cultivars are being sold now specifically as container plants.

Most of the penstemons available today are derived from just one Mexican species so, as you might expect, mild, dry winters are preferred. In Britain, though, our winters are cold and wet, so the penstemon has gained a reputation for being a bit difficult to overwinter. However, don't let this put you off – there are ways around the problem (see Growing advice).

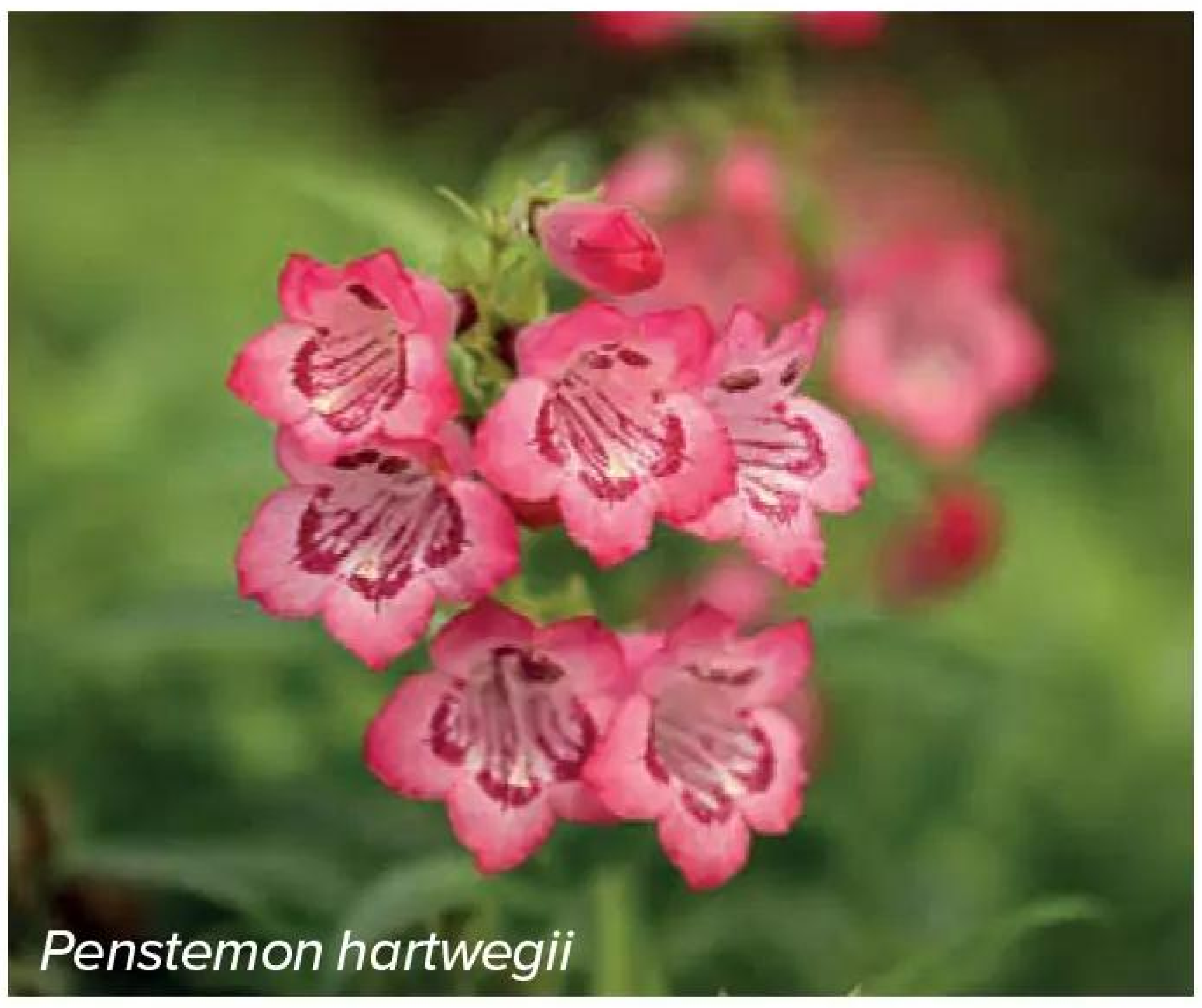
Some gardeners believe that the cultivars with narrow leaves are hardier than those with broader leaves. This may be the case, but hardiness varies between varieties, between gardens and between years, so it is impossible to say definitively whether a specific penstemon will survive in a specific garden.

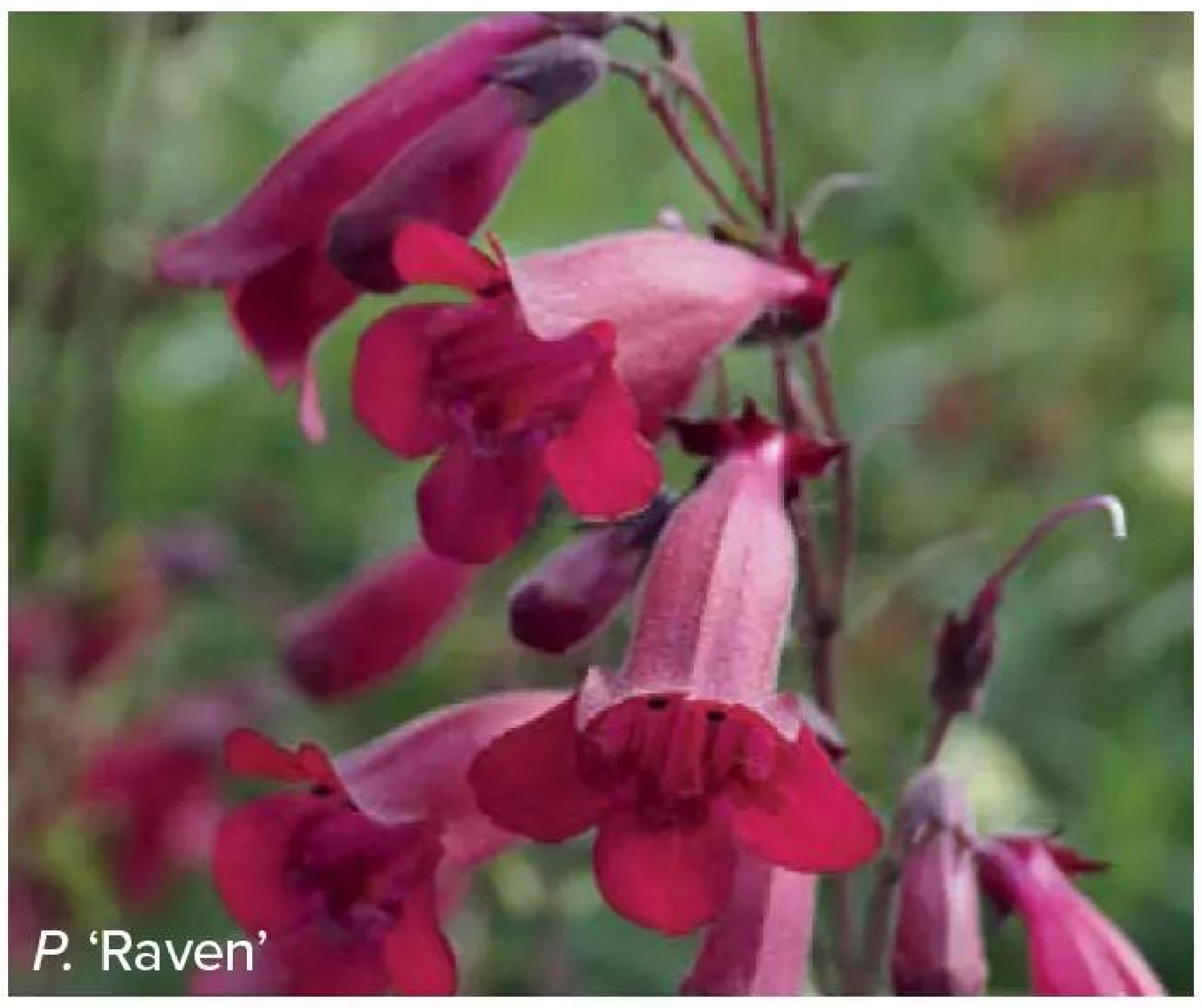
Penstemons flower from May to November – that's an impressive six months!

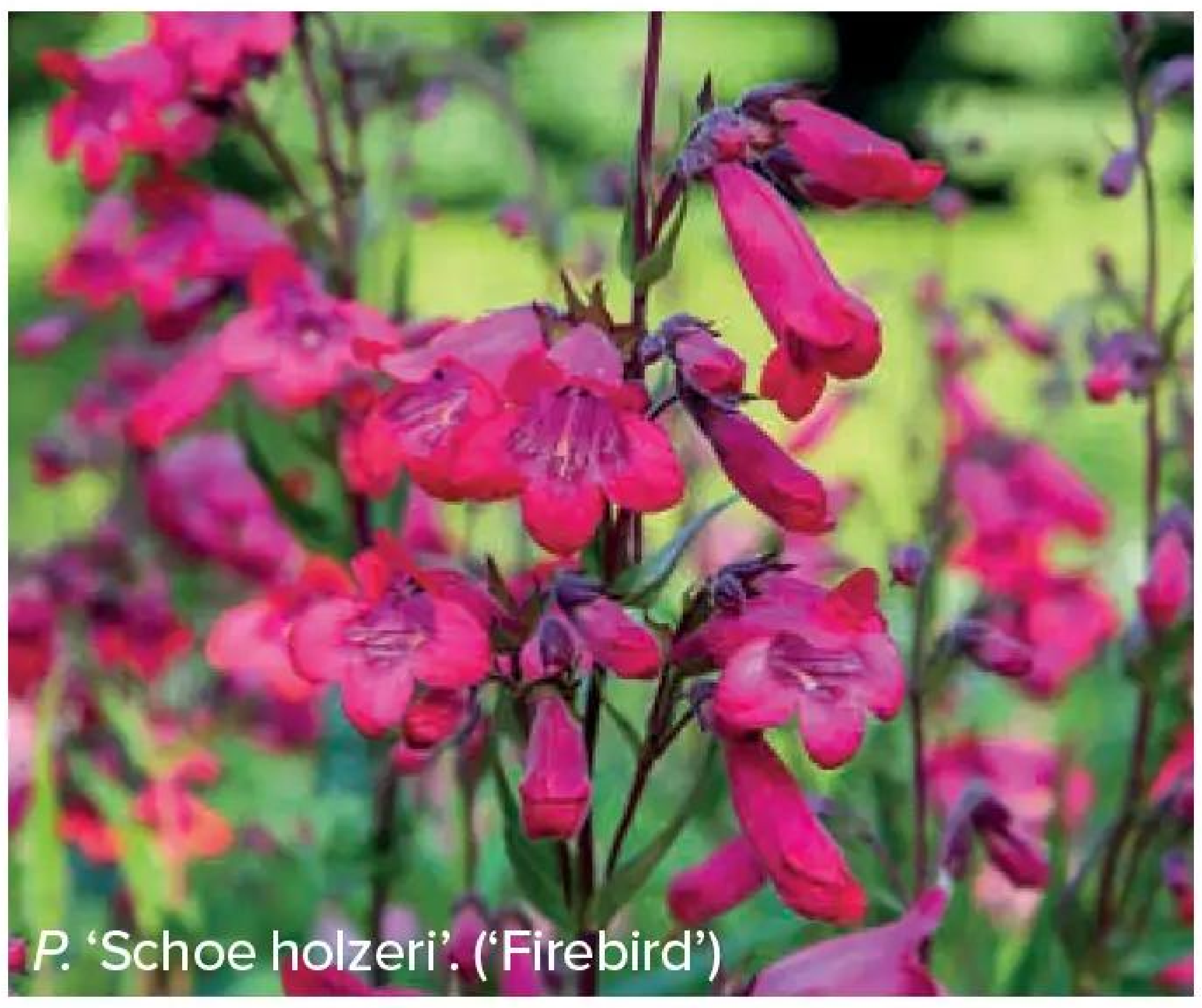
ALL PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK

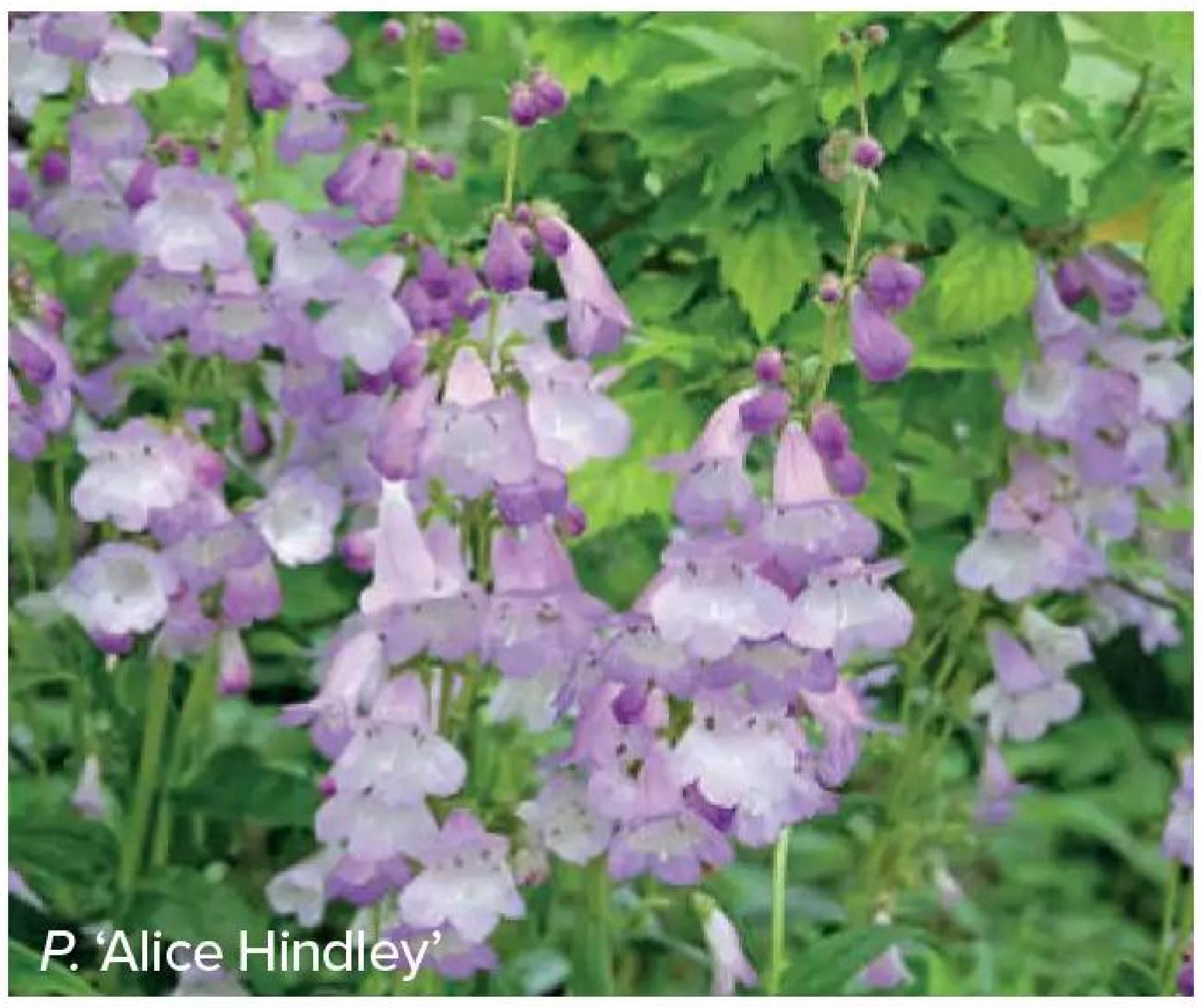
Top tips

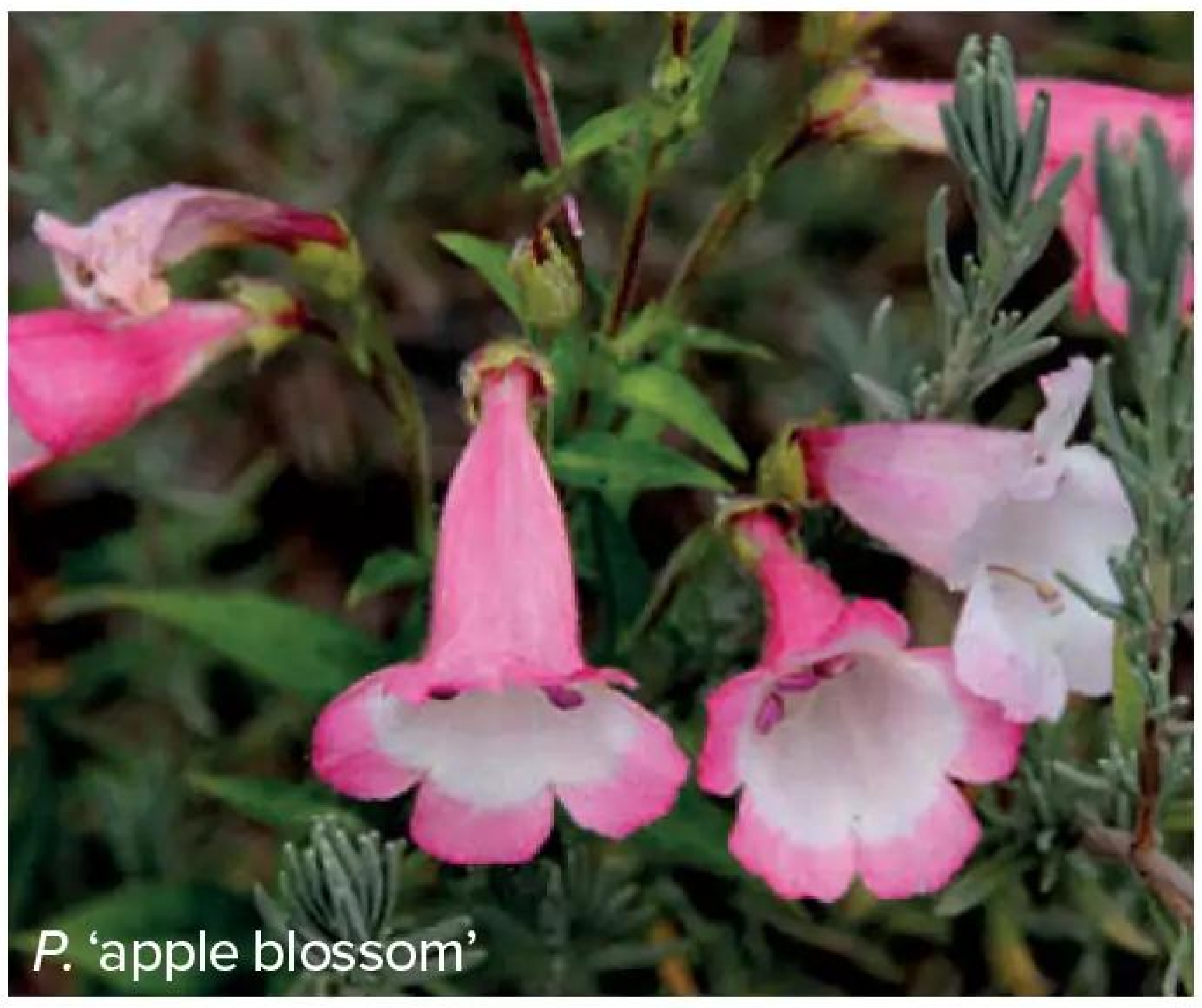
- Penstemons are resistant to slugs and other pests, but attractive to bees
- They are reasonably drought tolerant and resistant to rain (except in cold, wet, prolonged winters)

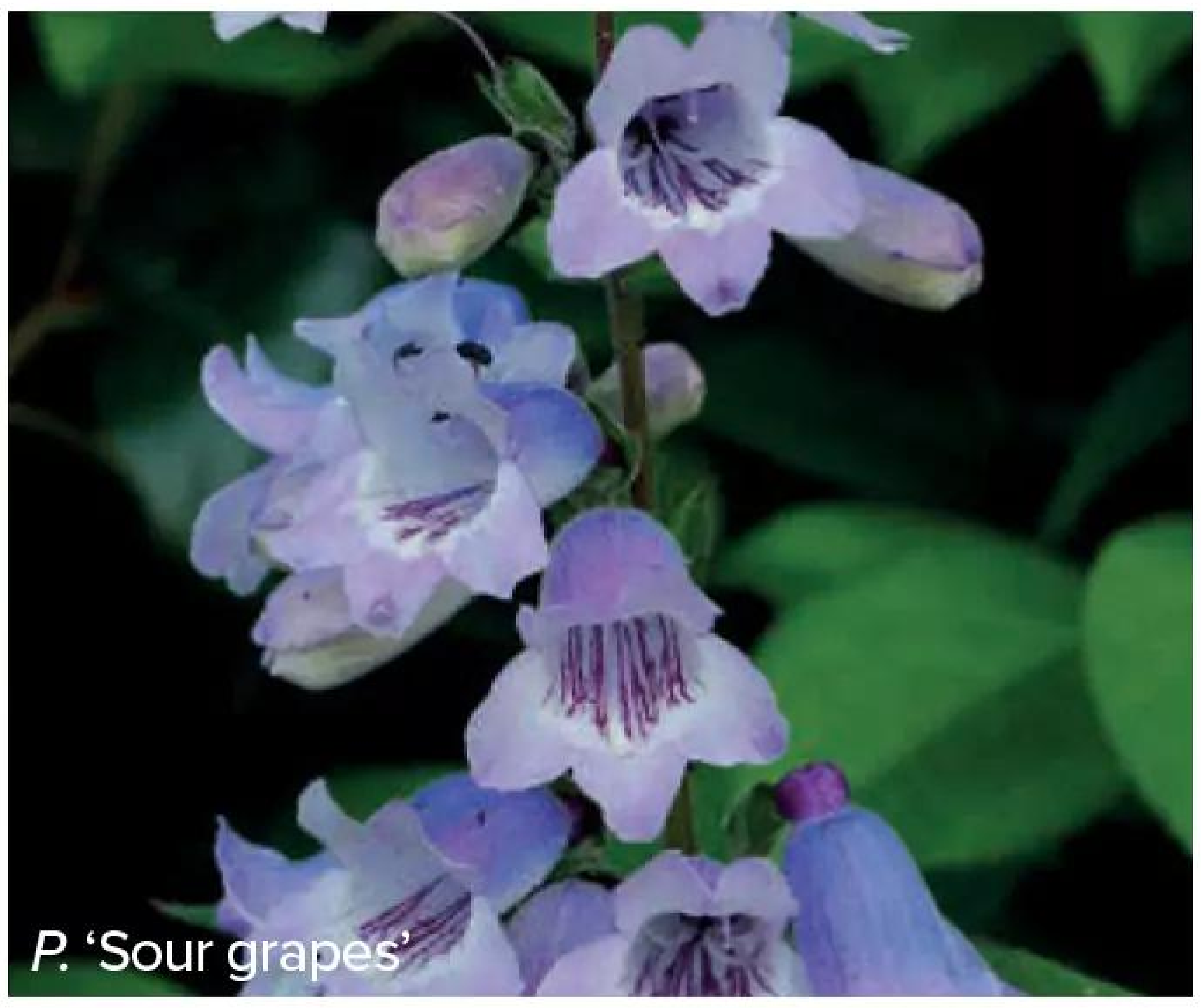

Penstemon hartwegii

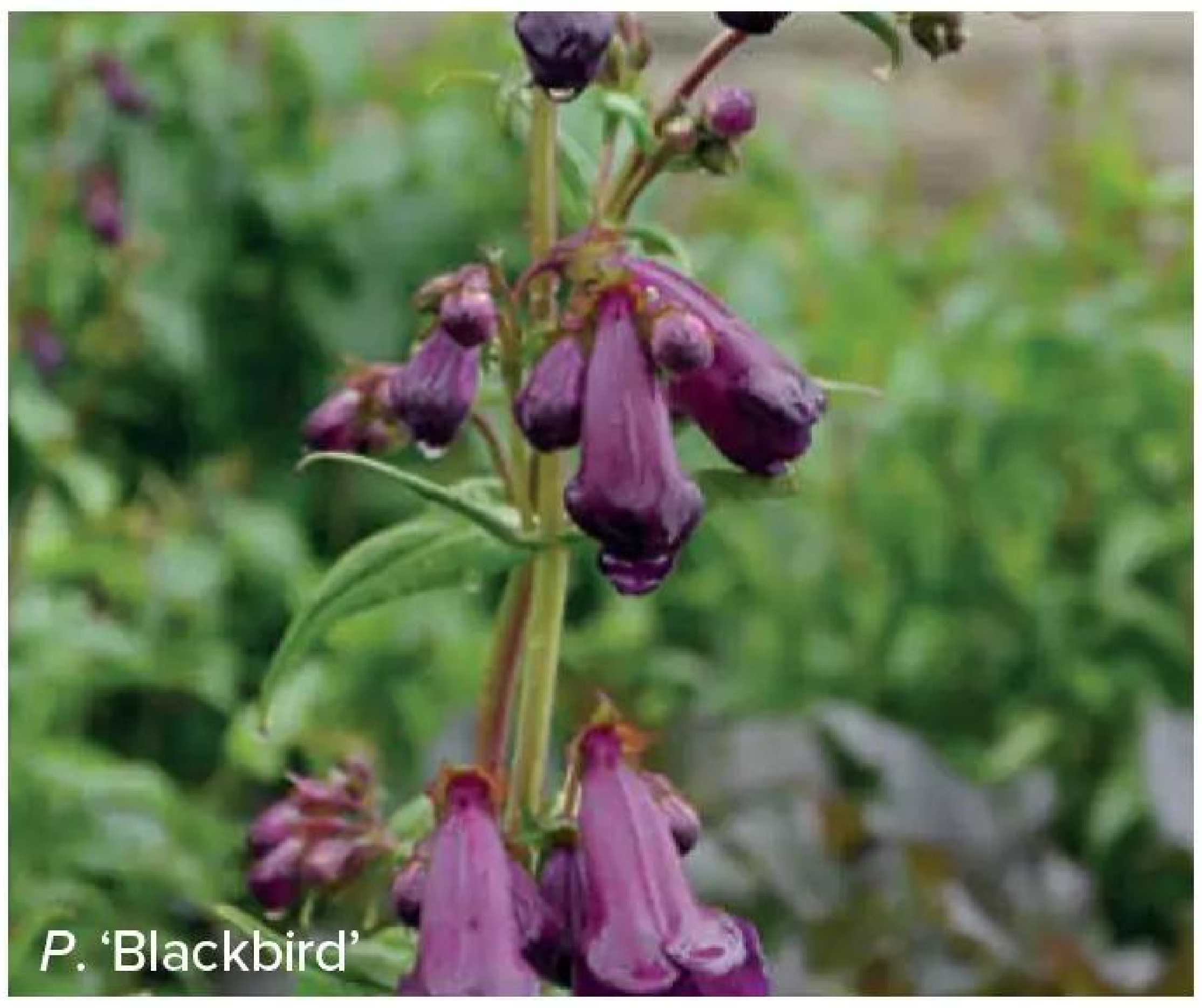

P. 'Raven'

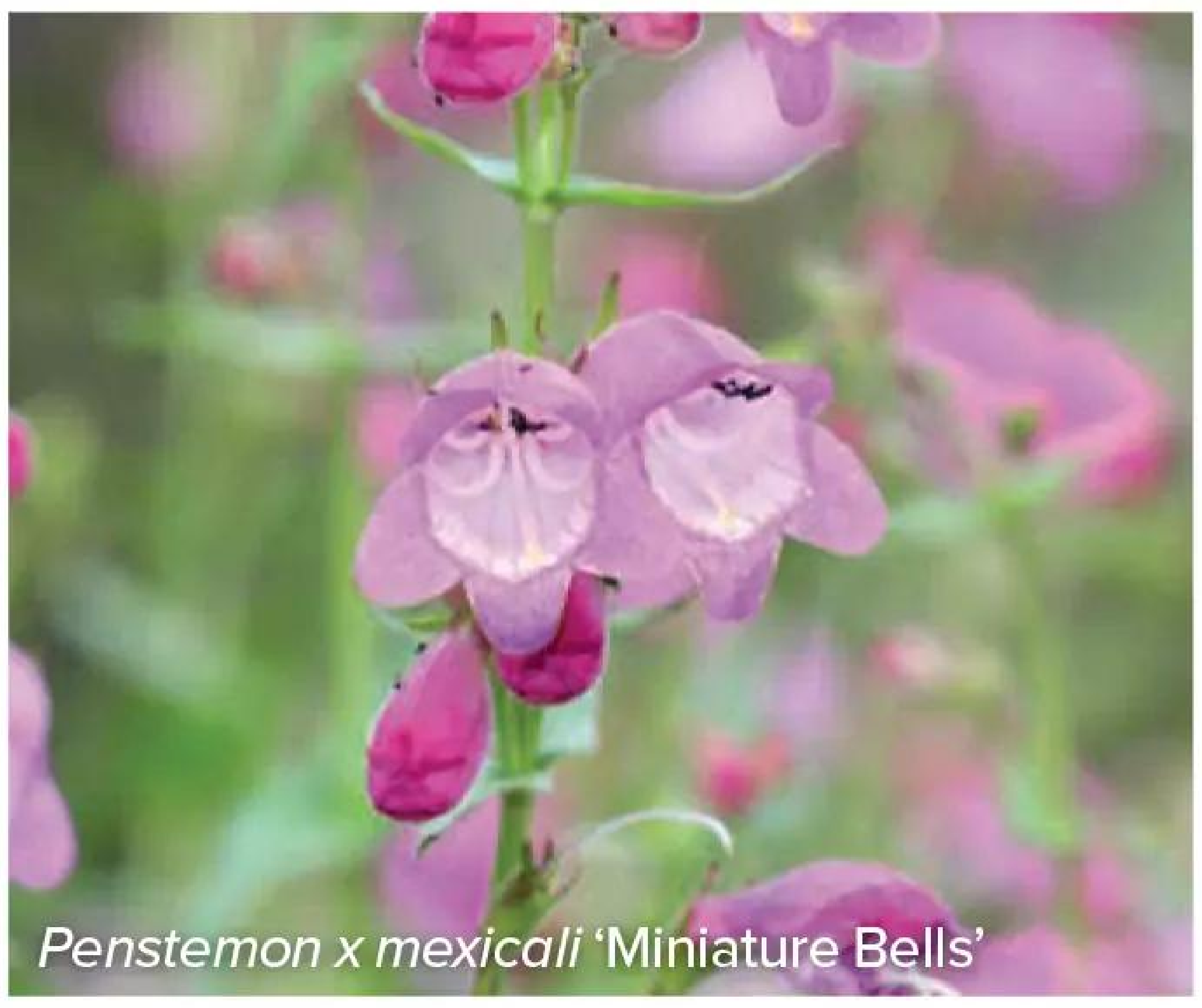

P. 'Schoe holzeri'. ('Firebird')

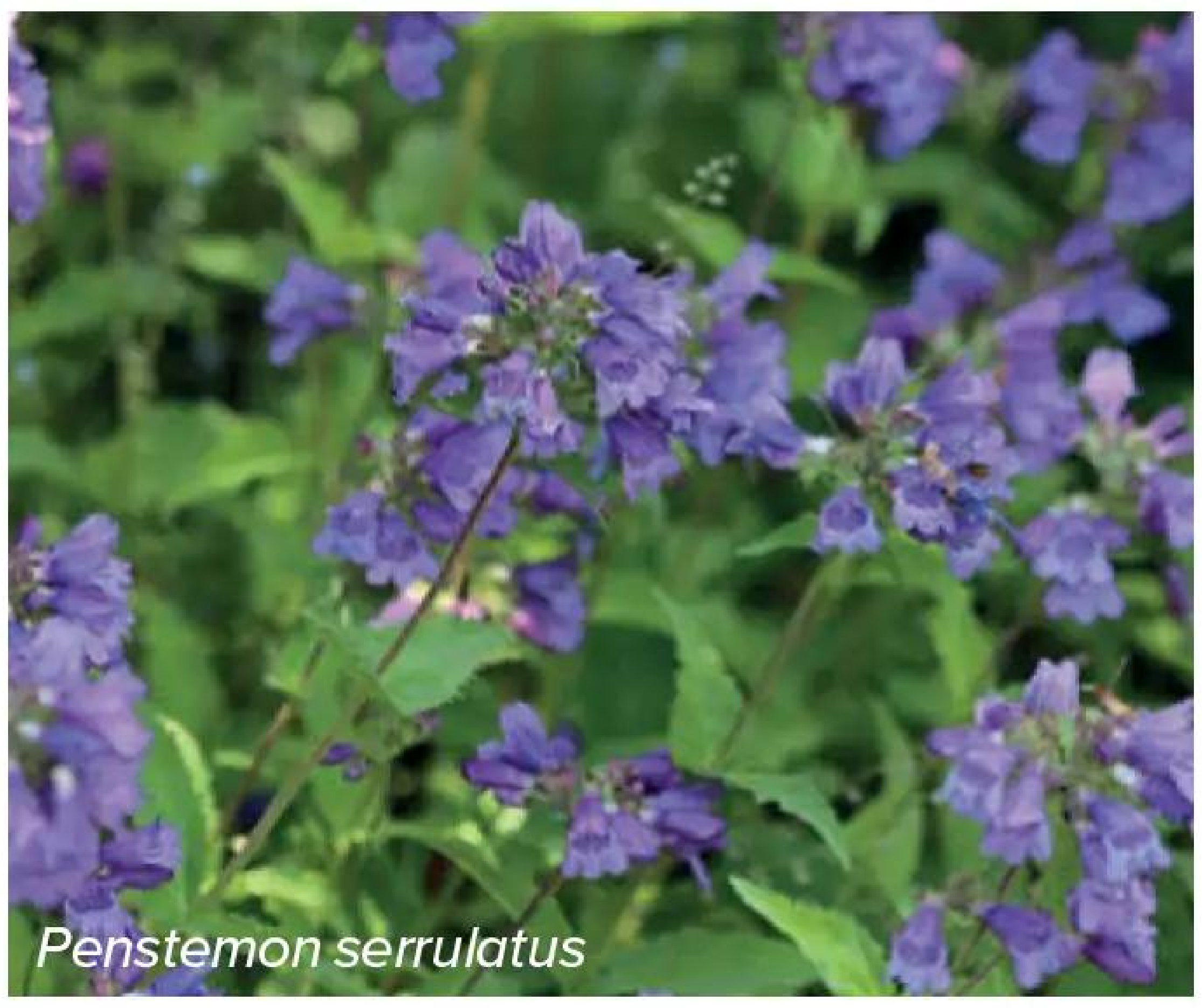

P. 'Alice Hindley'


P. 'apple blossom'


P. 'Sour grapes'


P. 'Blackbird'


Penstemon x mexicali 'Miniature Bells'


Penstemon serrulatus

GROWING ADVICE

- **Water:** Water regularly during the first growing season. Once established, penstemons are relatively drought-tolerant. Avoid overwatering though, as they're susceptible to root rot.
- **Care:** Apply a balanced, slow-release fertiliser in spring, but avoid over-fertilising, which can lead to soft, floppy growth.
- **Deadheading:** Deadhead regularly during the growing season, by removing the whole flower spike.
- **Hardiness:** As mentioned earlier, over-wintering can be tricky. Some gardeners cut back their penstemons by a third to a half in autumn. This reduces the amount of above-ground growth that will be killed off. Others reckon that penstemons should not be deadheaded or cut back at all after the end of September – and not pruned down for the new season until the end of March at the earliest.

What you choose to do will depend on the variety, your soil and location, and there may be some trial and error involved! Take softwood cuttings in late spring or summer as a back-up. Pot cuttings into well-draining compost and overwinter in a frost-free place.

Pests and diseases

Penstemons are generally pest-resistant, but watch for slugs and snails on young plants. Ensure good air circulation to prevent powdery mildew, and avoid overhead watering to prevent leaf spots.

Did you know… The one type of penstemon that has so far eluded breeders is a large-flowered yellow one. The only true yellow currently available is *P. pinifolius* 'Mersea Yellow', but this is a tiny alpine form

Cranesbill

Geranium

Plant: March-May

Position: full sun

Hardiness: -15°C to -20°C

Propagate: cuttings/division

Easy and dependable, hardy geraniums provide us with months of flowers and effective groundcover

Hardy geraniums, also known as cranesbills, have become established as Britain's most valuable, most appreciated, and most collected hardy perennial. Not to be confused with the frost-tender geraniums of window boxes and bedding schemes, hardy geraniums, while lacking in flamboyance, make up for this their long flowering season, resilience, weed suppression and their knack for mingling with other plants.

There are varieties for sun or shade, for moist soil and dry, and for rich soil and poor. There are dwarf and compact varieties for the front of the border, large and bushy varieties for the middle ground, and groundcover varieties that have a long season of attractive colouring and prevent weed growth.

A few well-chosen varieties of hardy geraniums, and one or two slightly less hardy varieties, make fine container plants, cascading into clouds of colour as they tumble over the sides. A few will clamber into mature shrubs, behaving almost as climbers.

Flowering from spring to autumn, if you're looking for flowers in blue or lilac shades, in pinks, in white and with pretty patterns and markings, and often with a bright white eye – all set off by attractive foliage – then the range is extraordinary.

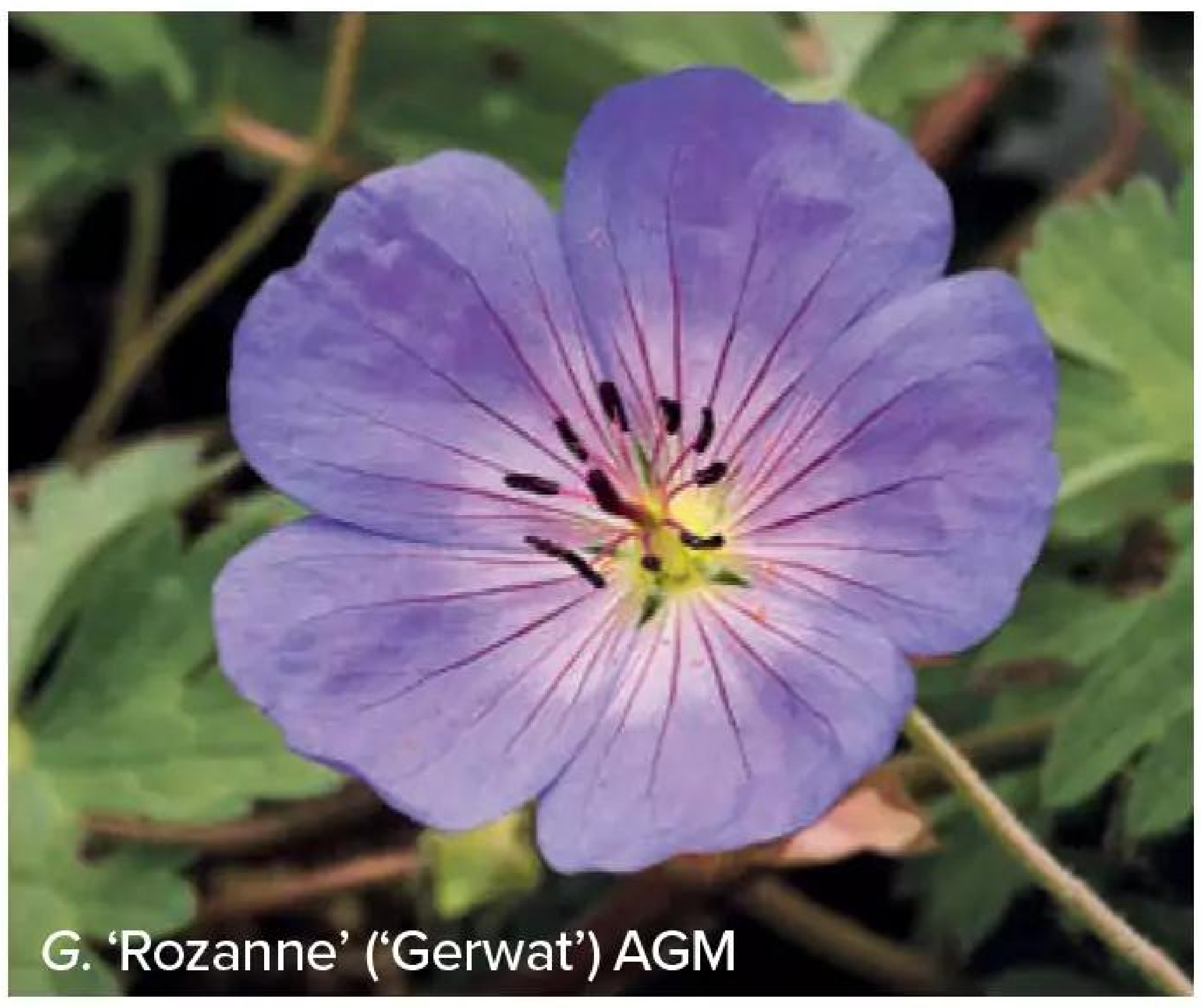
ALL PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK

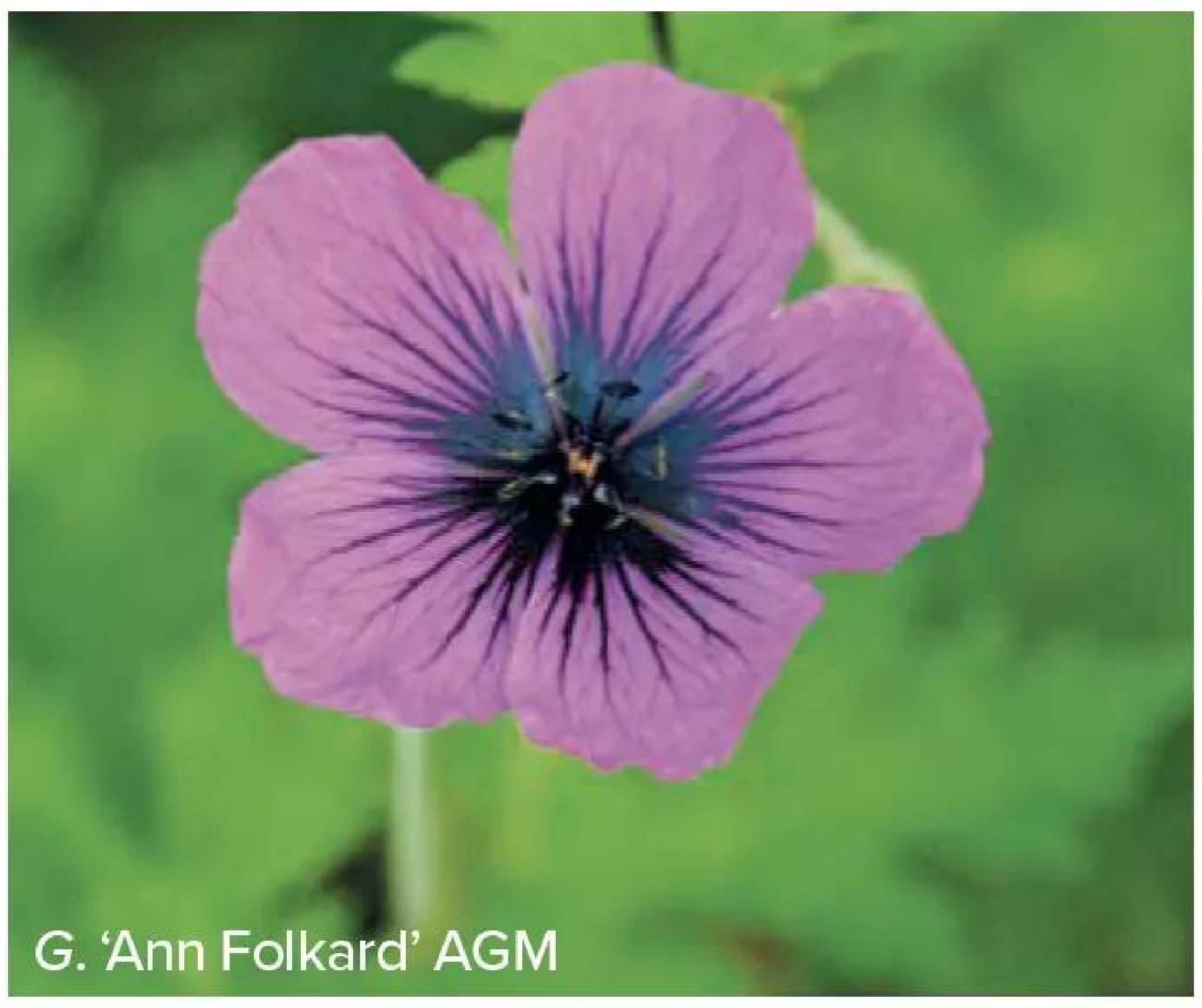
Did you know...

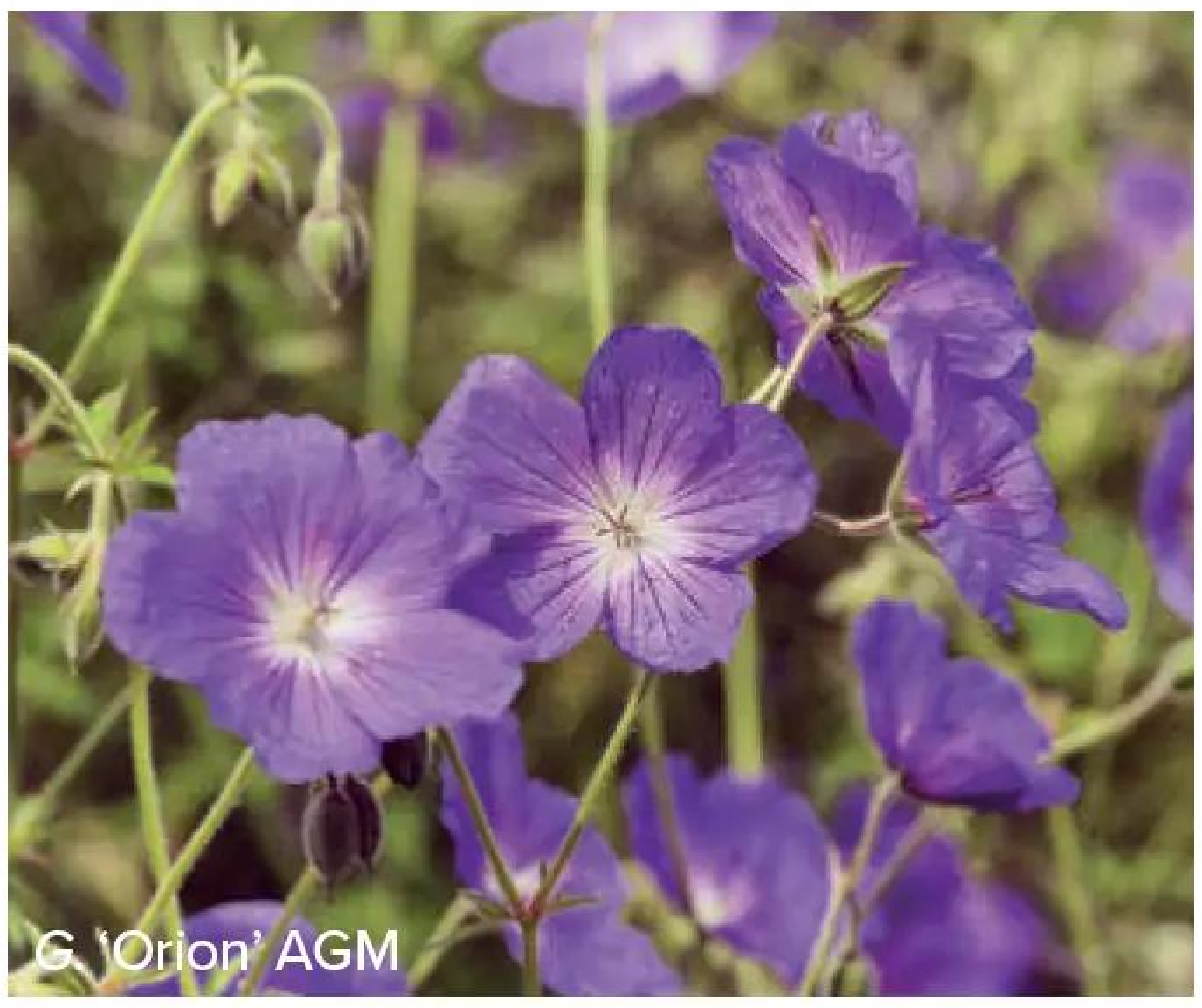
There are varieties for sun or shade, for moist soil and dry, and for rich soil and poor

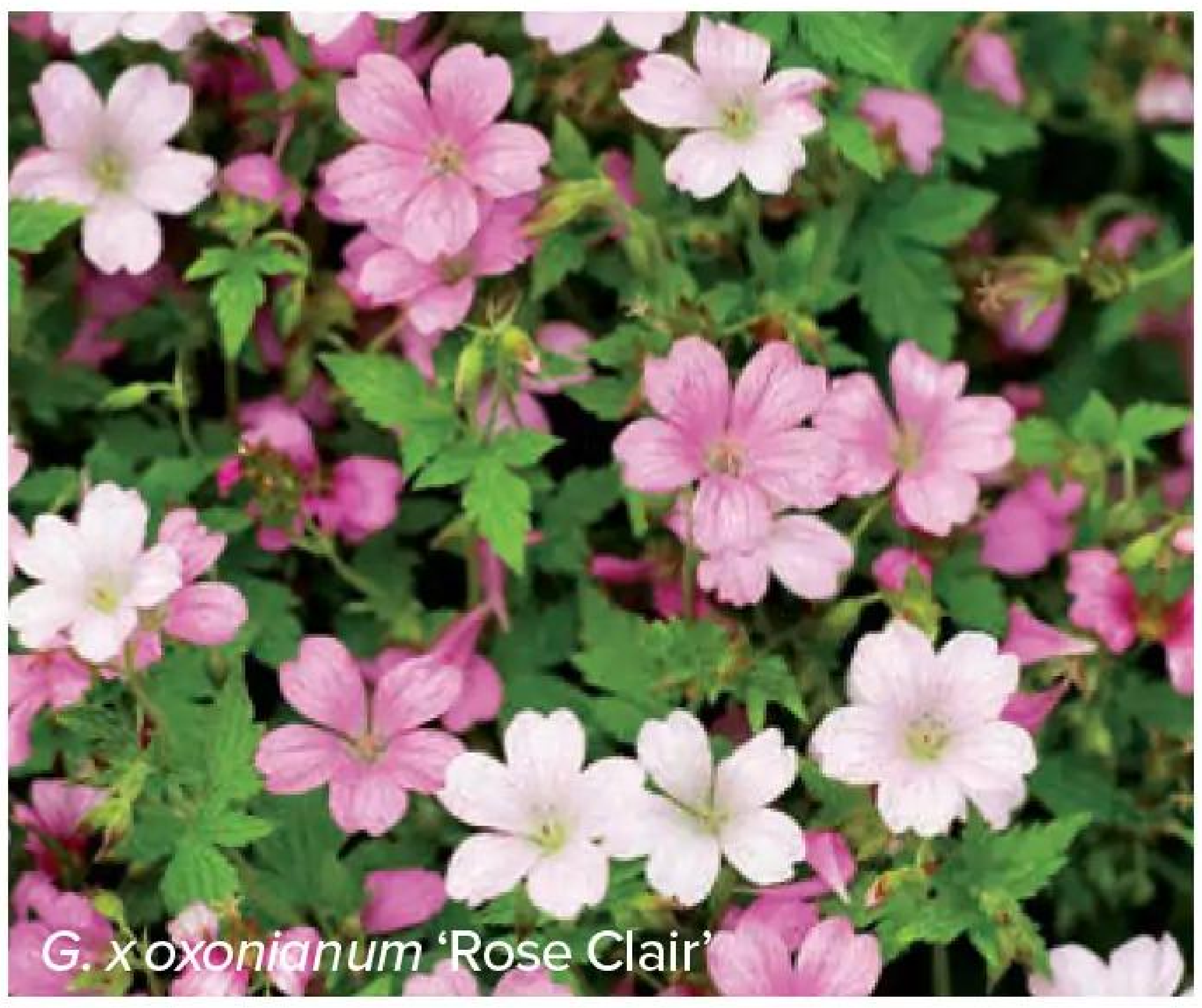
Top tips

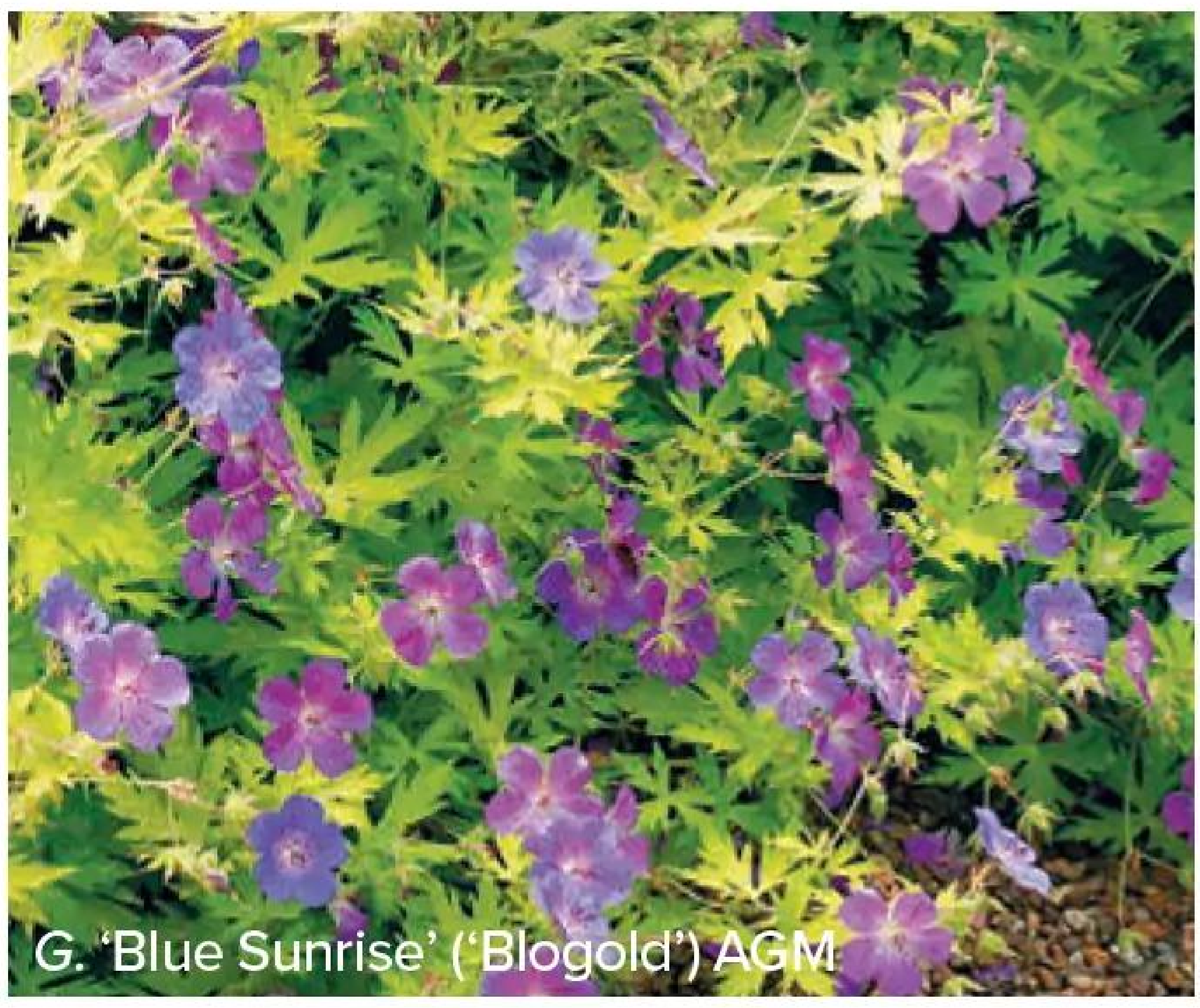
- Most are easy to grow and require little or no special treatment
- Attractive foliage is often an important secondary feature
- Pests and diseases rarely cause problems


G. ‘Rozanne’ (‘Gerwat’) AGM

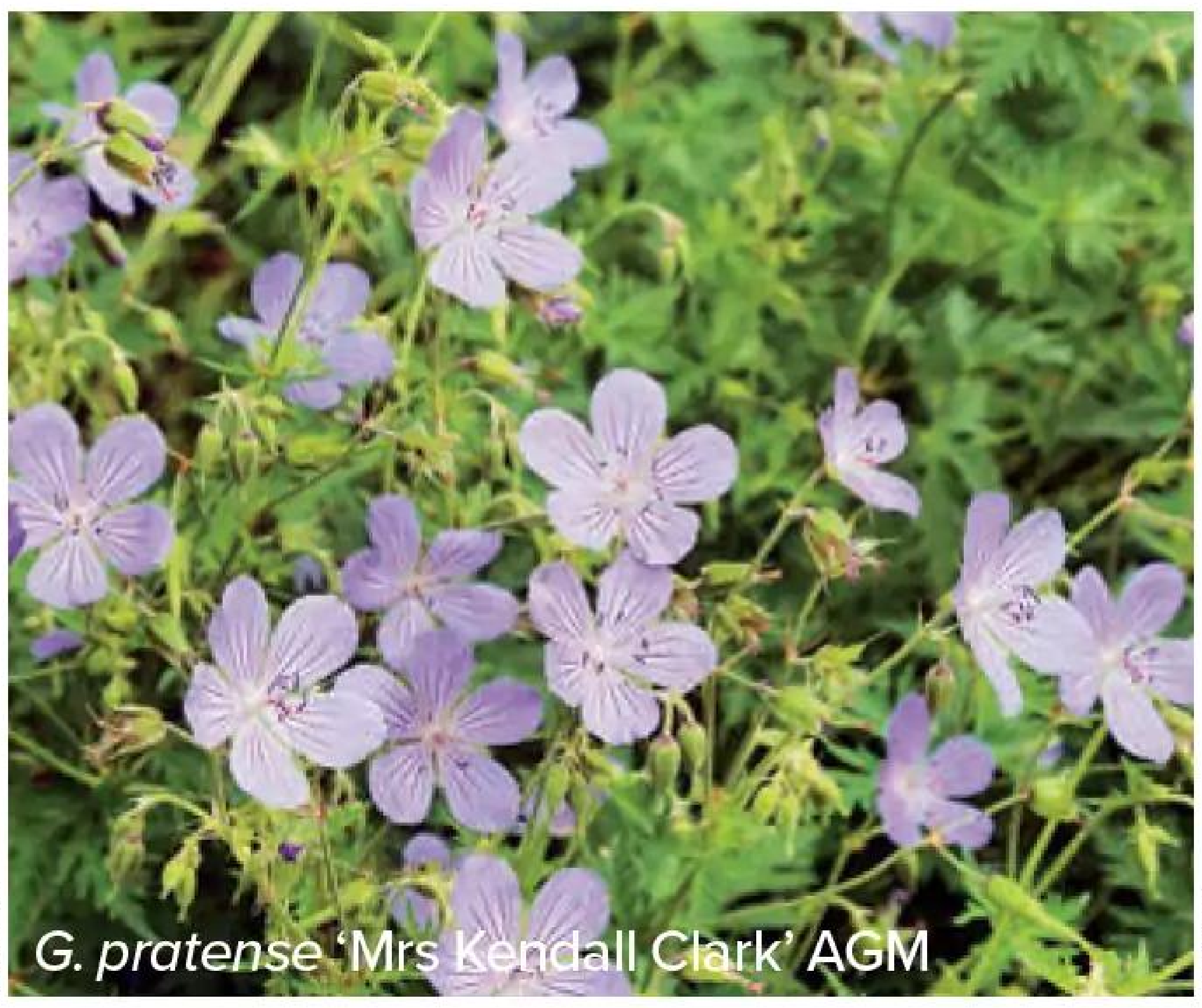

G. ‘Ann Folkard’ AGM


G. ‘Orion’ AGM

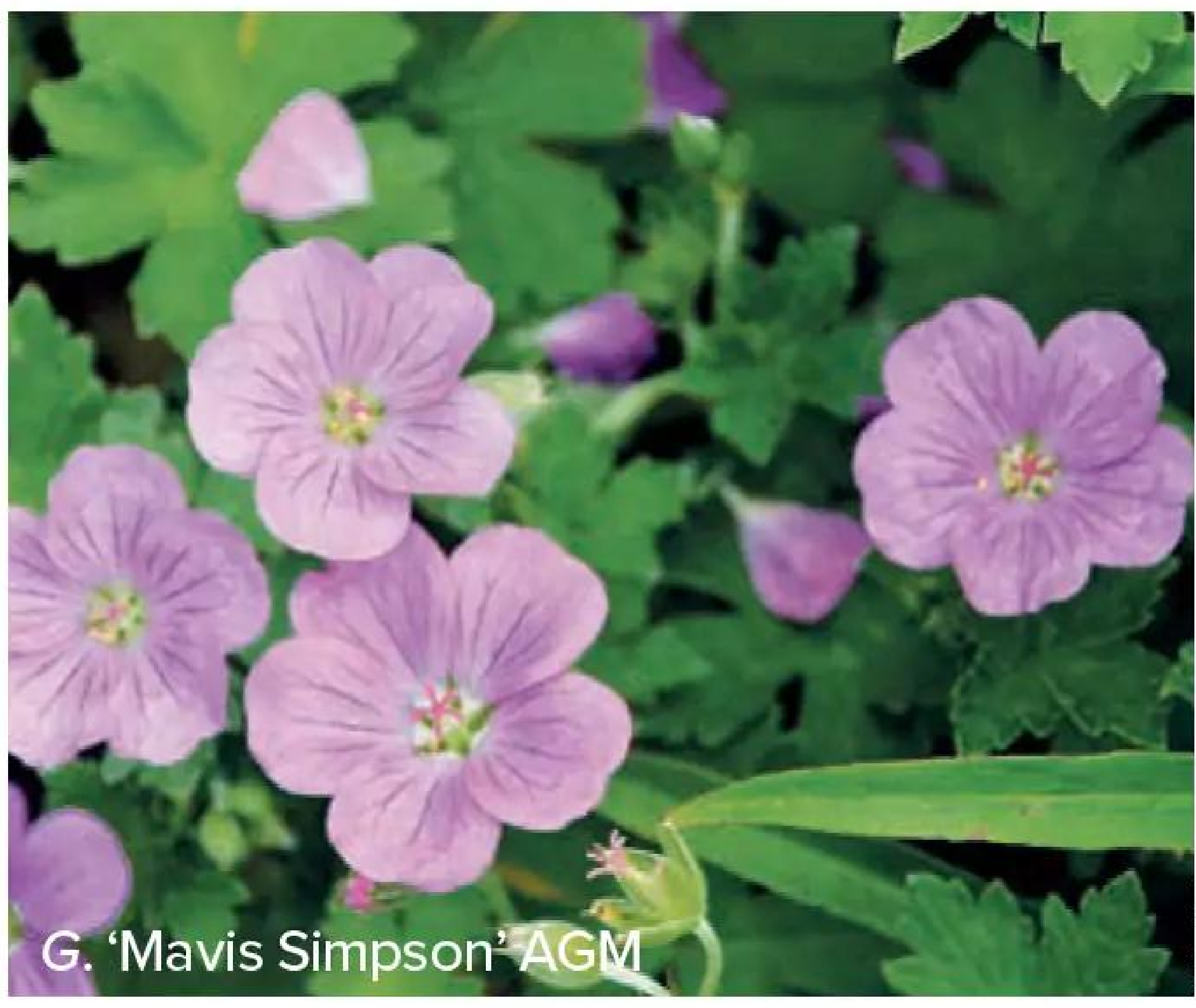

G. x oxonianum ‘Rose Clair’


G. ‘Blue Sunrise’ (‘Blogold’) AGM

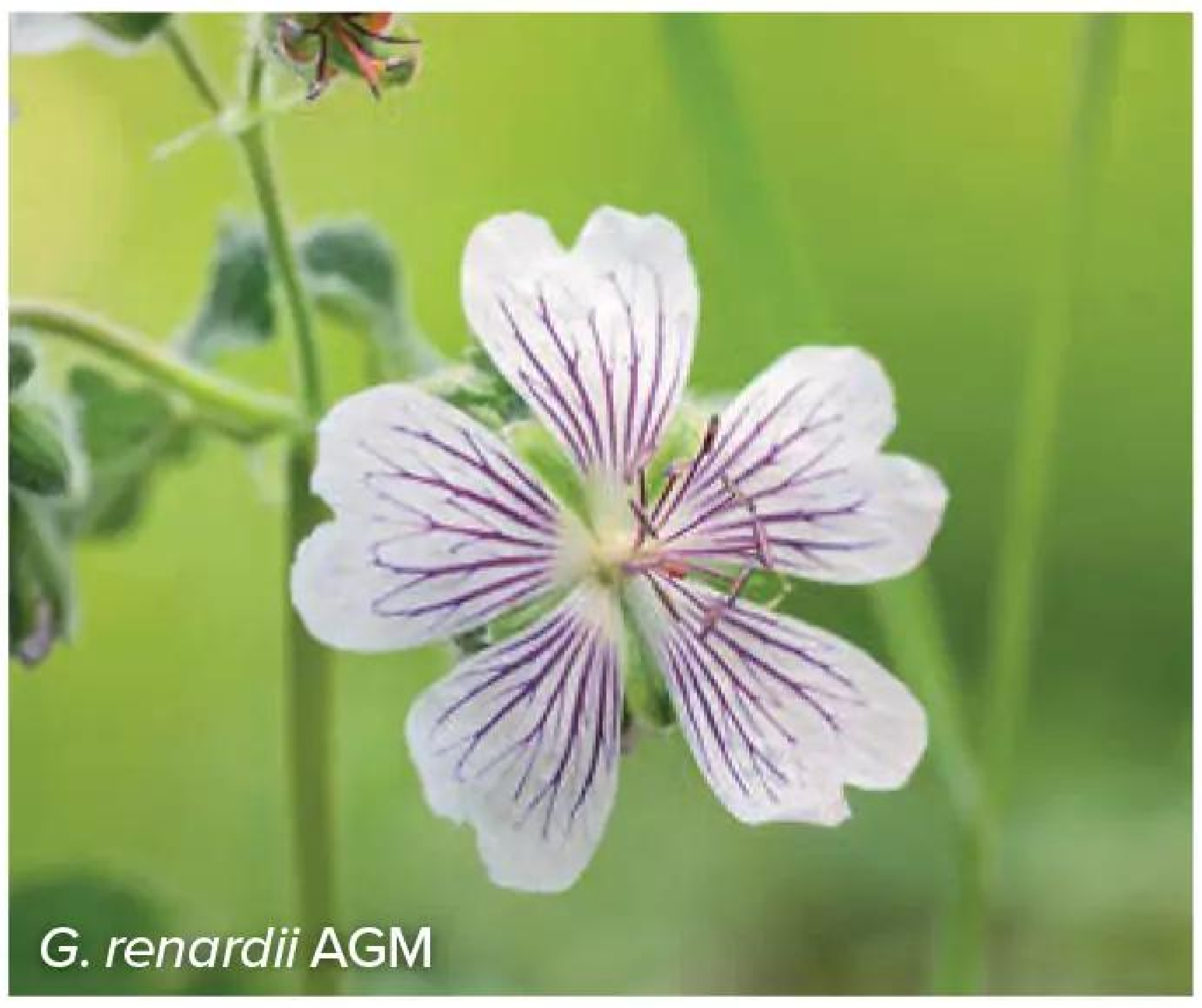
ALAMY

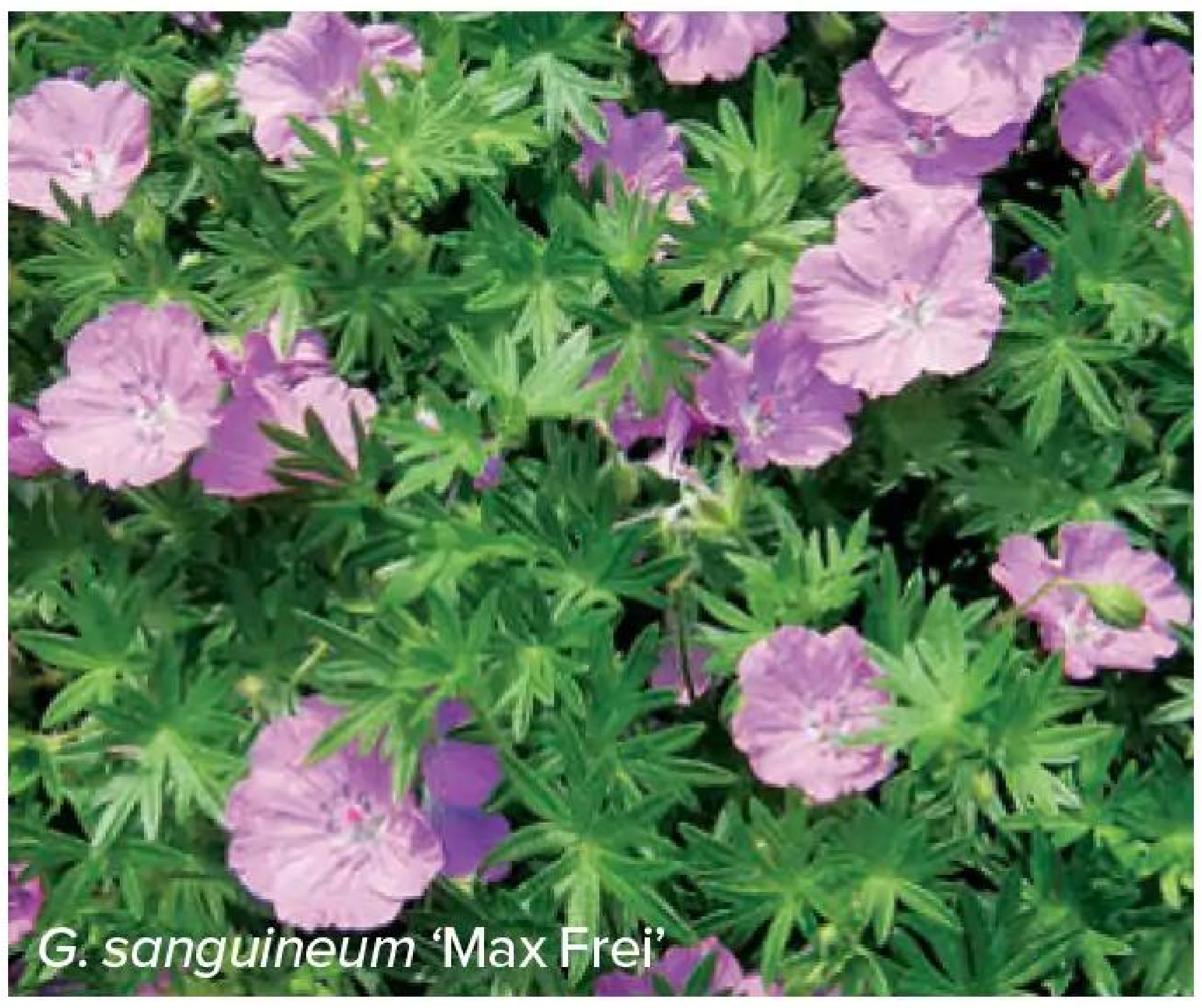

G. pratense ‘Mrs Kendall Clark’ AGM

ALAMY


G. ‘Mavis Simpson’ AGM

ALAMY


G. renardii AGM


G. sanguineum ‘Max Frei’

GROWING ADVICE

Whatever your conditions, there will be a cranesbill to suit it. Plant in spring or early autumn in well-draining, humus-rich soil. Water regularly during the first growing season and once established, they’re quite drought-tolerant. Avoid overwatering, as they dislike waterlogged conditions.

Avoid over-fertilising, which can lead to excessive foliage at the expense of flowers. Cut back after the first flush of flowers to encourage a second bloom, and in late autumn or early spring, cut back dead foliage.

Divide established clumps every 3-5 years in spring or autumn. Many varieties self-seed readily.

Long flowering period

The first hardy geranium flowers open in April. From May to September there are always geraniums in flower, with some extending the season into October, and flowering can be continuous without deadheading, although many will bloom more colourfully and more prolifically if clipped over with shears after the main flush of flowers is fading.

Geramium phaeum reportedly gets its common name of ‘mourning widow’ from its dark purple flowers, although more brightly coloured varieties are available!

Daylilies

Hemerocallis

Plant: autumn – end April

Position: full sun / light shade

Hardiness: to -20°C

Propagate: autumn or spring

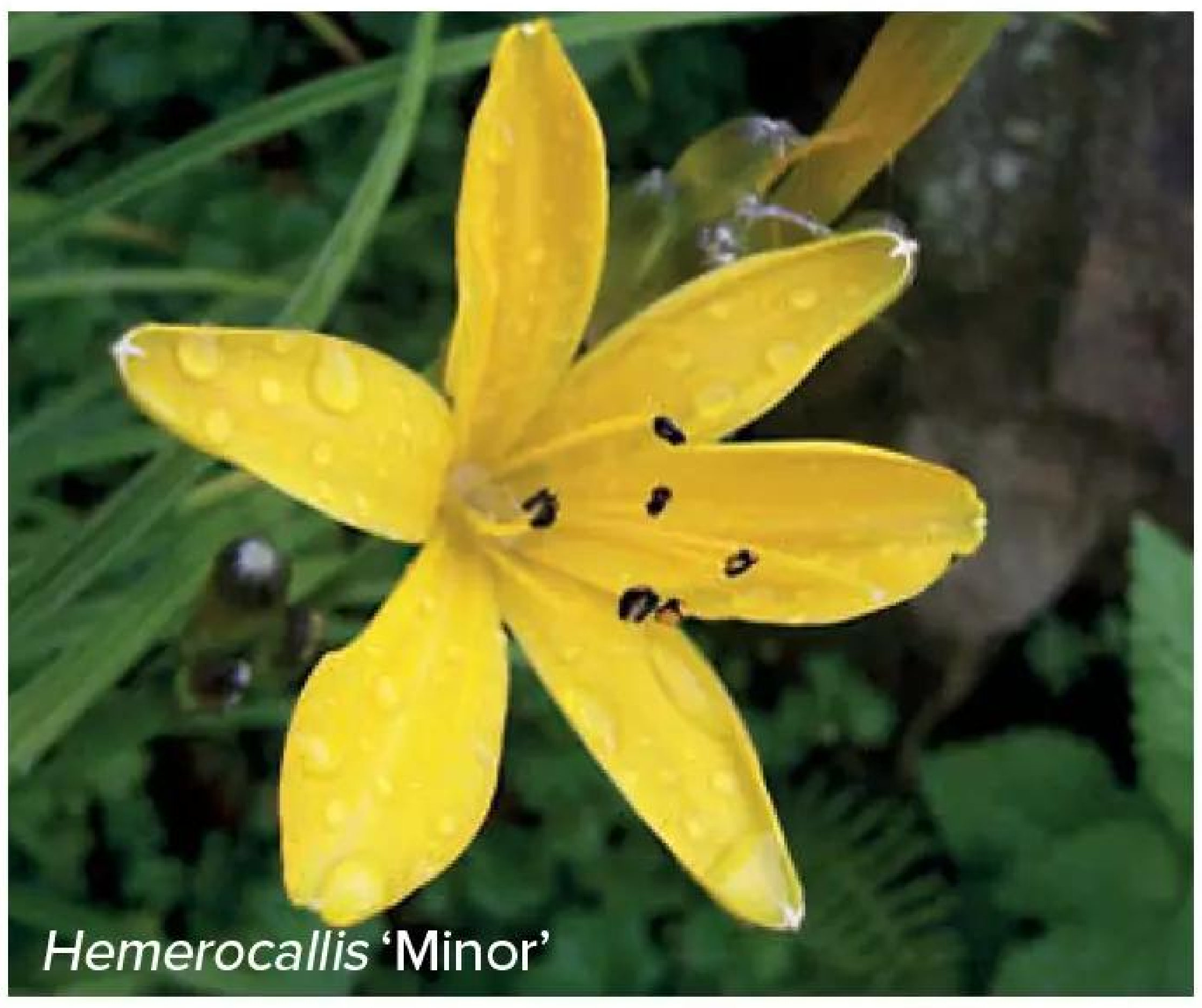
Daylilies are some of the easiest and most rewarding of summer-flowering perennials

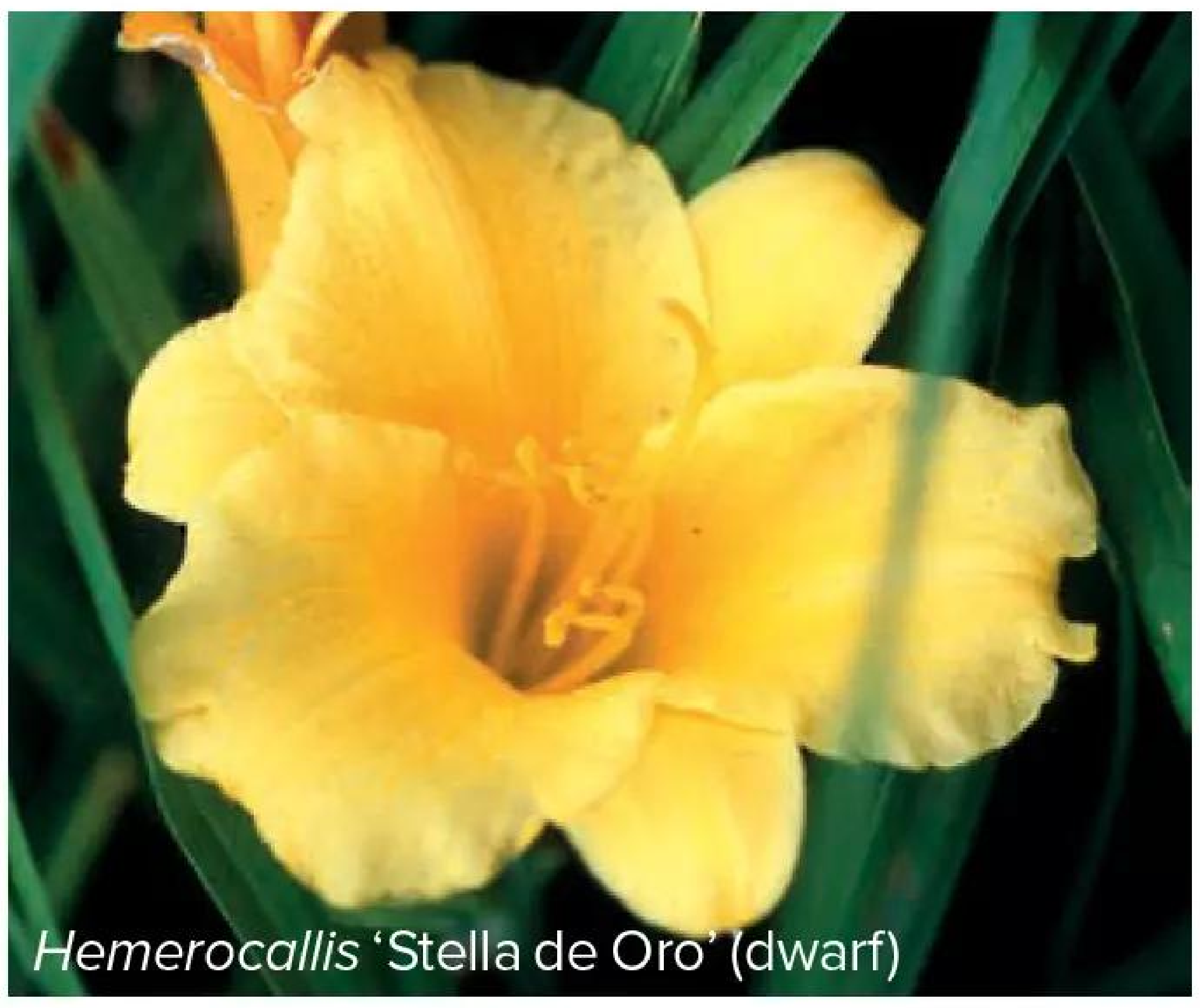
As their common name implies, daylily flowers only last for a day, but come in succession over a long period. The plants are very accommodating, growing well in sun or partial shade, meaning they can be used to add colour to many positions in the garden. In terms of colour, daylilies have a wide palette, from cream to nearly black, via light yellow, vibrant pink, dark red, deep burnt orange, and many striped and patterned combinations, as well as flower forms; however, as yet, there's no true scarlet/carmine. There are over 1,700 varieties listed in the RHS Plant Finder – and more in the USA – so you won't be short of choices.

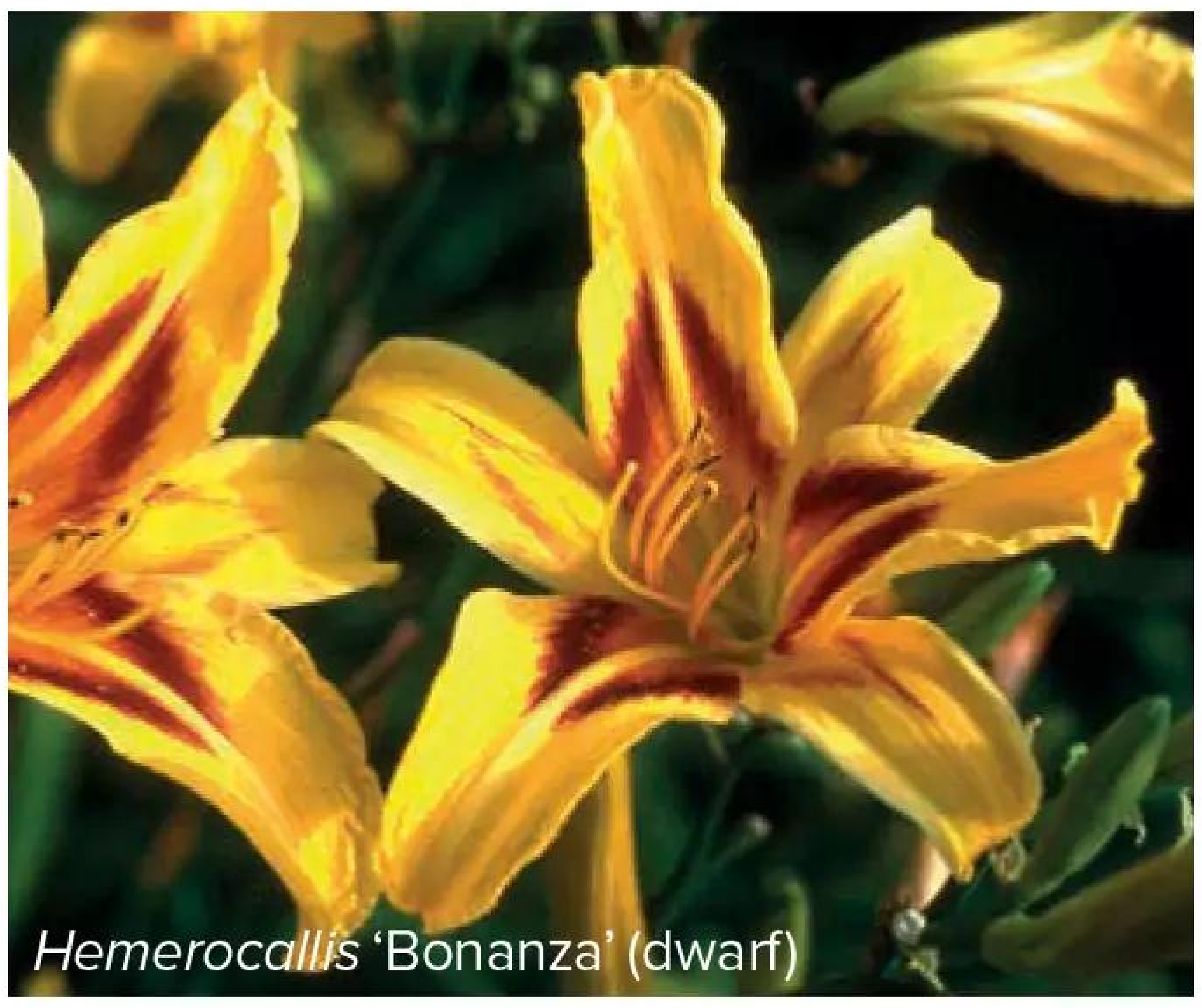
Although they thrive in rich, moist soil, daylilies will grow and flower in drier conditions, but there will be a reduction in the number of flowers they produce. In spring, the arching strappy leaves are a feature in their own right; the brightest of greens, they grow almost an inch a day. At flowering time, the leaves complement the trumpet flowers, which come on smooth stems ranging in height from 15-30cm (6-12") for dwarf varieties, to 90-120cm (36-48in) for the tallest.

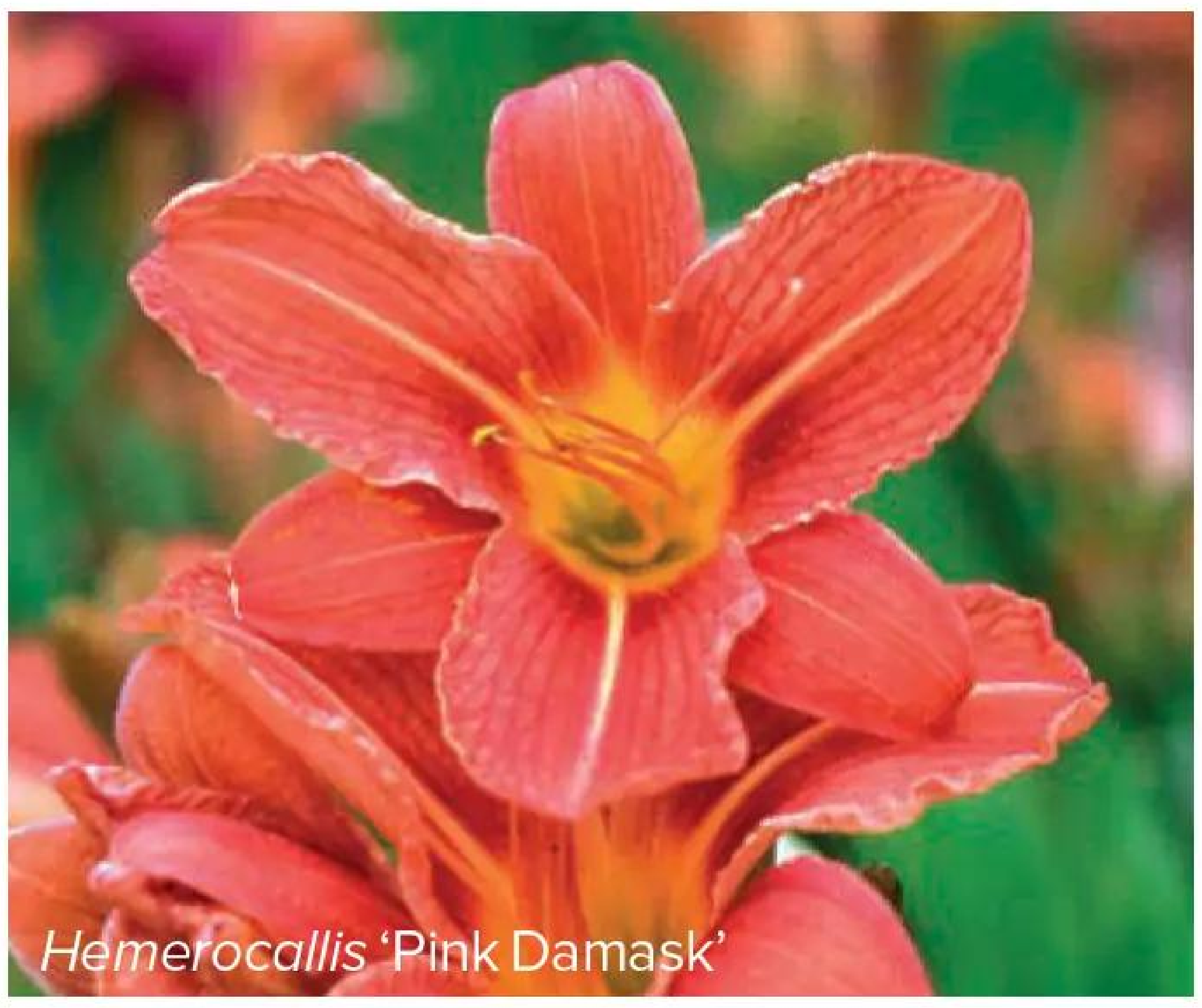
Top tips

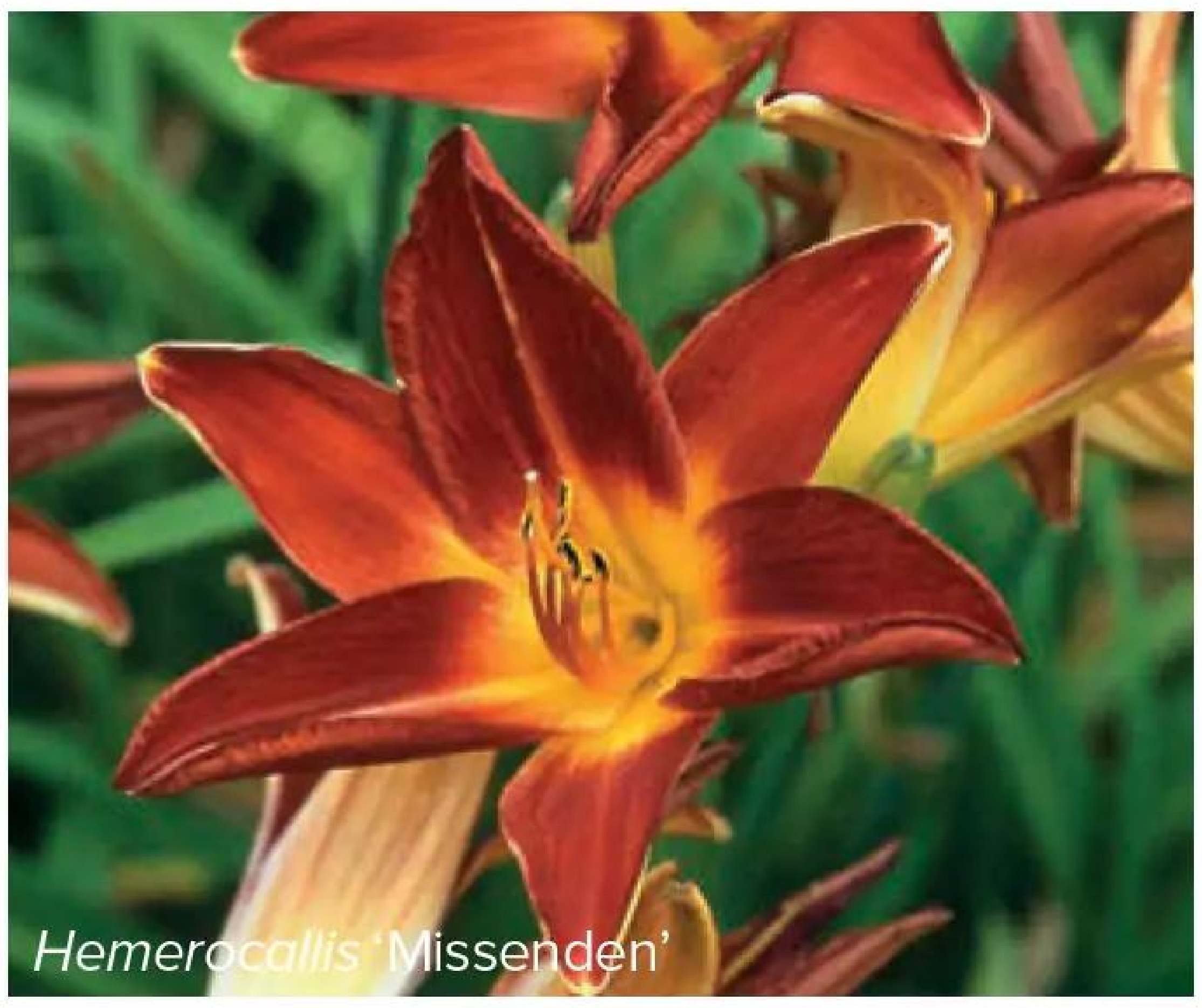
- Single-coloured flowers make a better statement in a border
- Plant different varieties to have a growing season that lasts from early to late summer
- If you want scent, plant yellow varieties

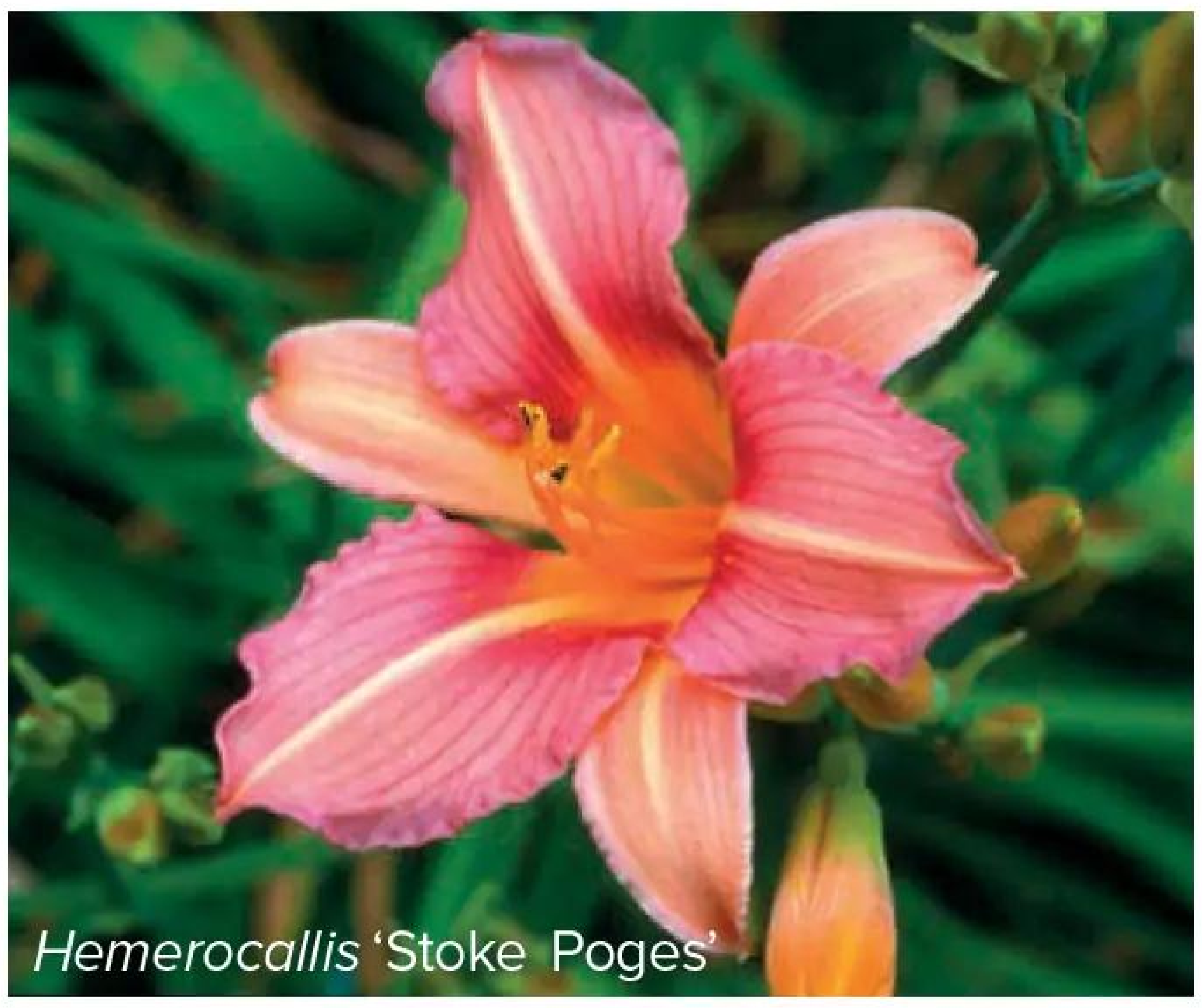

Hemerocallis 'Minor'

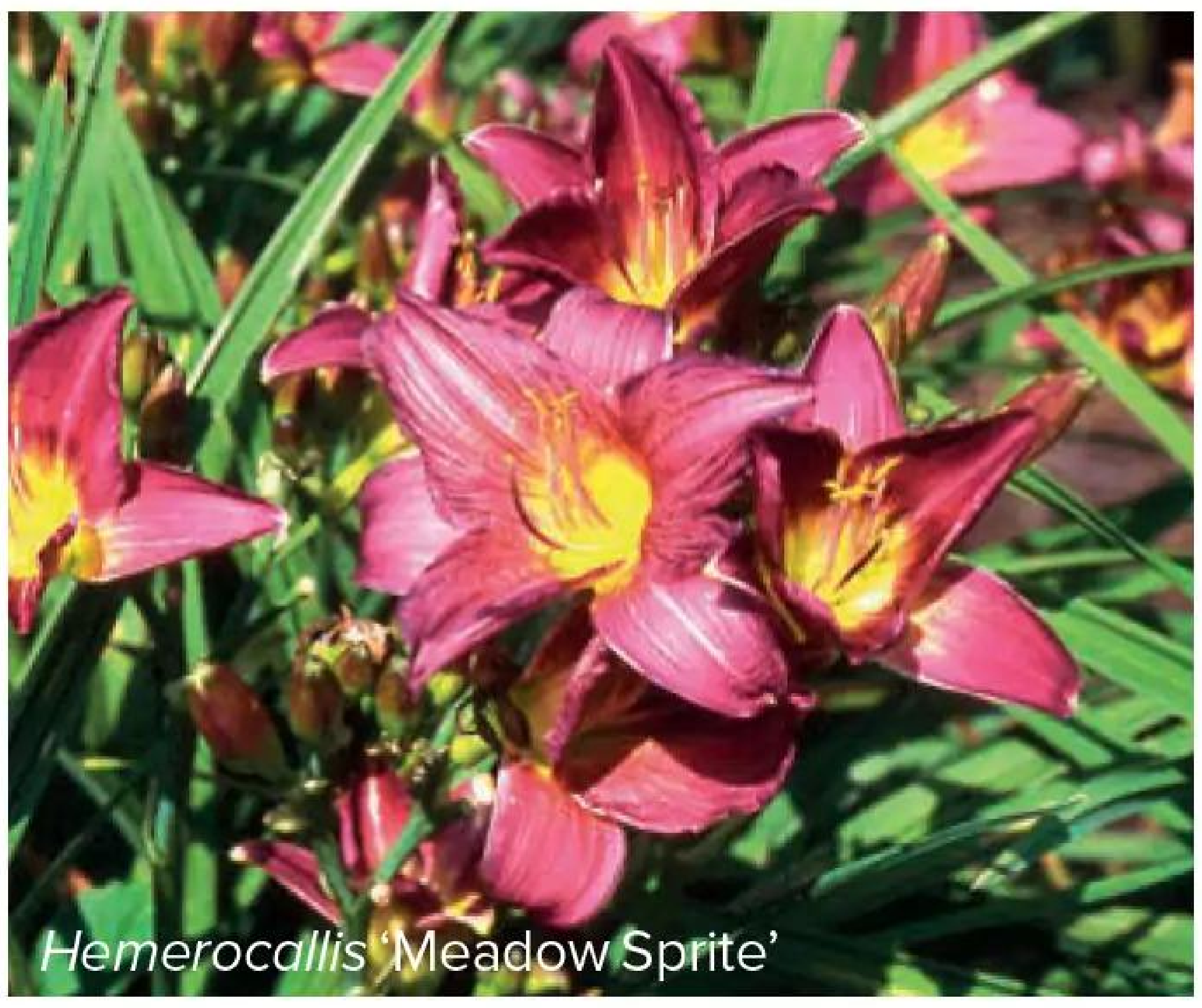

Hemerocallis 'Stella de Oro' (dwarf)

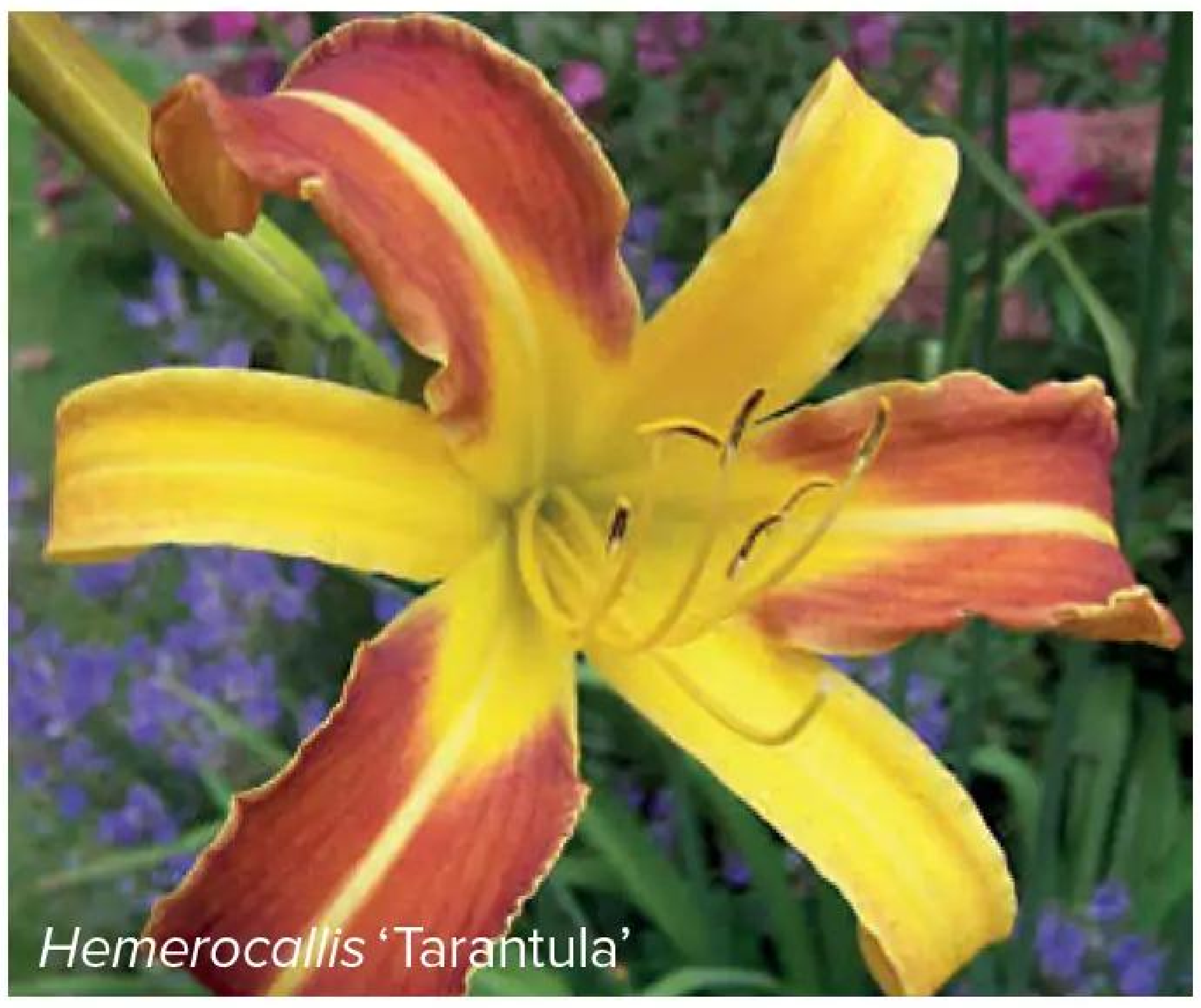

Hemerocallis 'Bonanza' (dwarf)

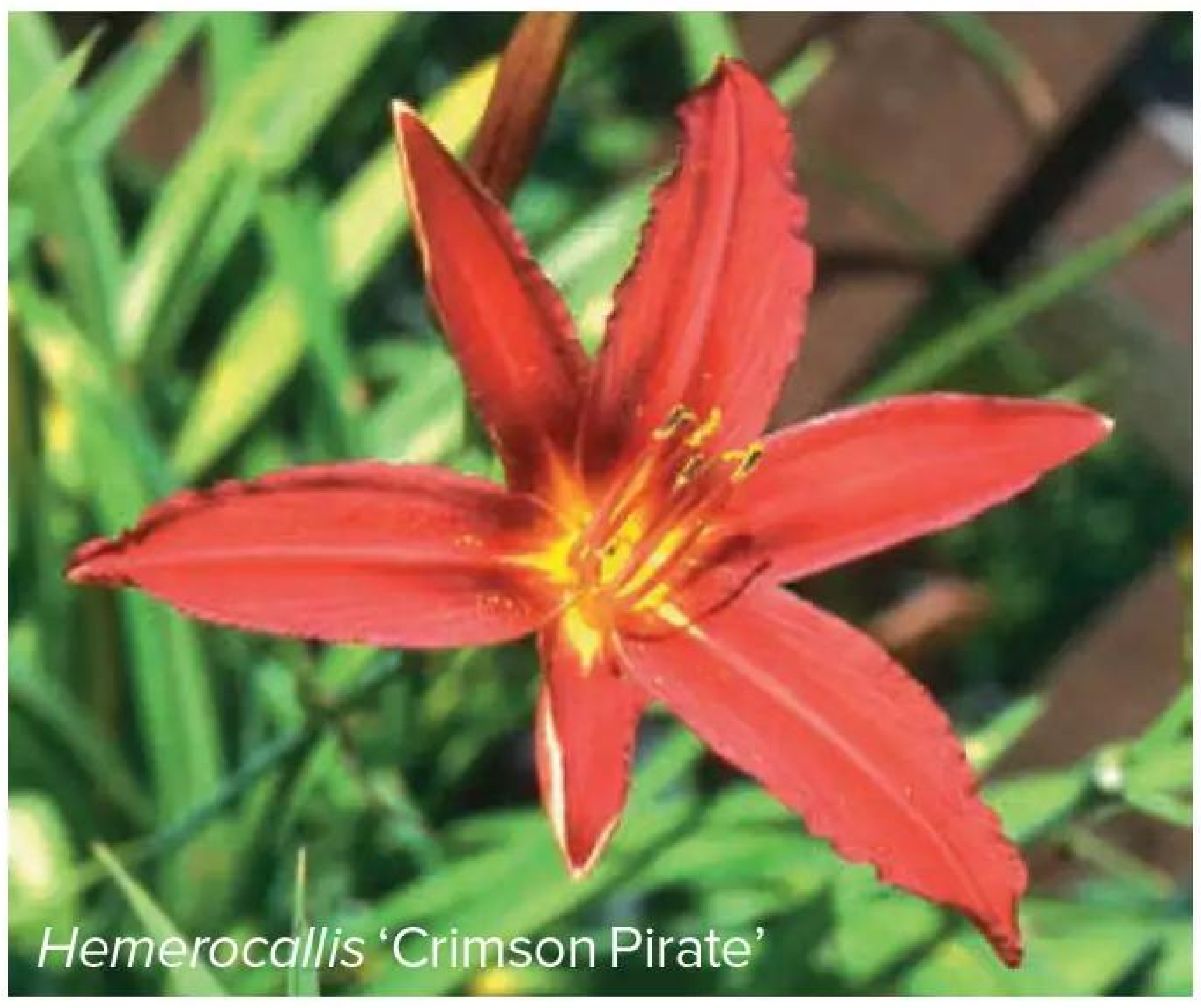

Hemerocallis 'Pink Damask'


Hemerocallis 'Missenden'


Hemerocallis 'Stoke Poges'


Hemerocallis 'Meadow Sprite'


Hemerocallis 'Tarantula'


Hemerocallis 'Crimson Pirate'

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** Full sun to light shade – heavy shade depresses flower production; most soils are tolerated, but fairly rich, loamy soil is best.

✿ **Hardiness:** Good hardy plants, to temperatures as low as -20°C (-4°F).

✿ **Planting:** Plant at any time from early autumn until the end of April. Soil should be enriched in advance, and when fully established some general fertiliser and mulching in spring will help flower production.

✿ **Deadheading:** Cut back dead flowerstalks to the base, as soon as the last flowers on it have faded.

✿ **End of season:** Cut away all foliage, right back to soil level, in the autumn. If you leave this, it will simply turn to an untidy mess over winter.

✿ **Propagation:** Divide in autumn or spring; plants become large and difficult to lift when old. You can ignore the rules about 'carefully lifting and gently teasing the roots apart'! Instead, roughly spade through a clump in situ – either to reduce its size or to obtain sections for planting elsewhere; it's easier than digging up a big plant and then dividing it.

Seeds germinate in 2-6 weeks at 16°-21°C. Sow in containers in a cold frame in autumn or spring; seed from hybrids/cultivars won't be the same as parent plants, but will still be beautiful.

Pests and diseases

- Daylilies are prone to rust.
- Can be attacked by gall midge, aphids, spider mites, and thrips.
- Slugs and snails may damage young leaves.
- Crown rot is an issue in high humidity and temperatures greater than 32°C.
- In areas where there are alternating winter freezes and thaws, bacterial leaf and stem rot may be a problem.

Cosmos

Plant: spring/ autumn

Position: full sun

Hardiness: -5°C

Propagate: seed

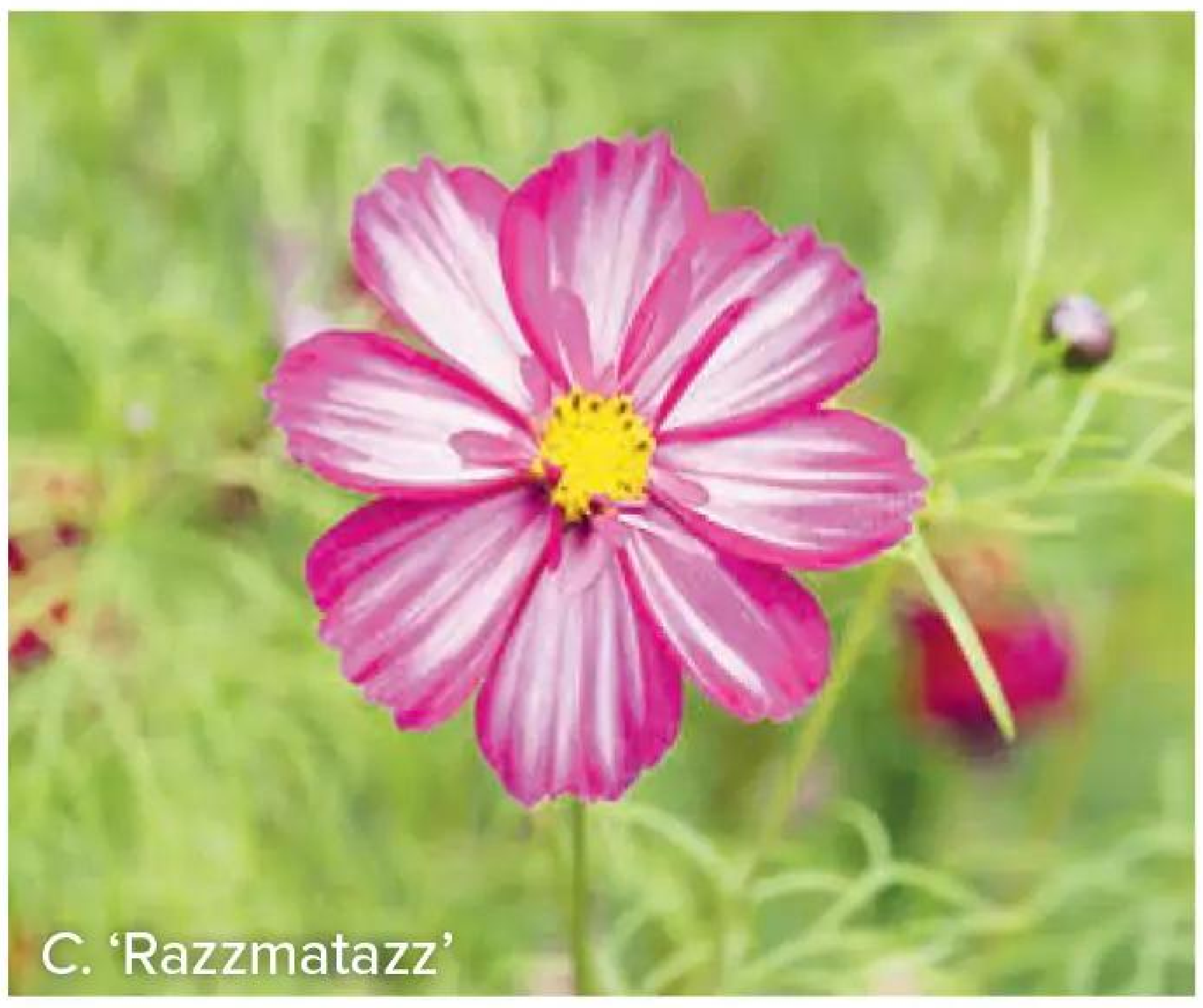
Sun-loving plants with a long flowering season, cosmos are great for colour, cutting and even fragrance

Cosmos atrosanguineus has dark red, chocolate-scented flowers.

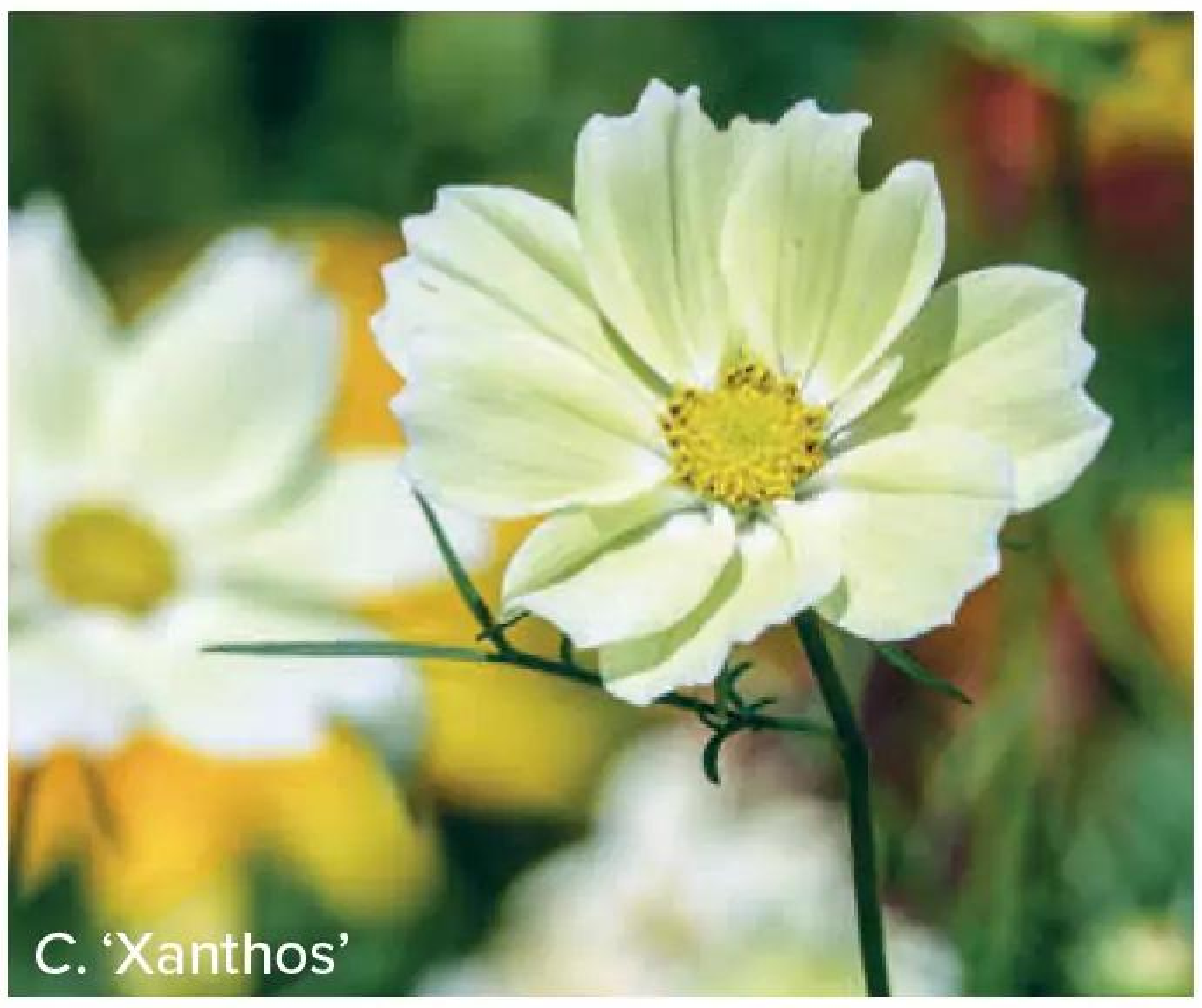
Most cosmos are sun-loving annual flowers that bring us a summer-long season of golden-eyed daisy flowers set against fresh green, feathery foliage. Easily raised from seed sown in spring, the plants have a gentle and relaxed style that fits well with other annual and perennial flowers, as well as shrubs. They make superb cut flowers and shorter varieties can also be grown in large containers.

The feathery-leaved annual cosmos with the large red, pink, pale-yellow or white flowers are derived from *Cosmos bipinnatus*. The annuals with broader foliage and smaller flowers in fiery shades are derived from *Cosmos sulphureus*, which are slower to start but may overwinter in mild areas. The chocolate-coloured and chocolate-scented varieties are derived from *Cosmos atrosanguineus*, and their tubers are the most likely to overwinter.

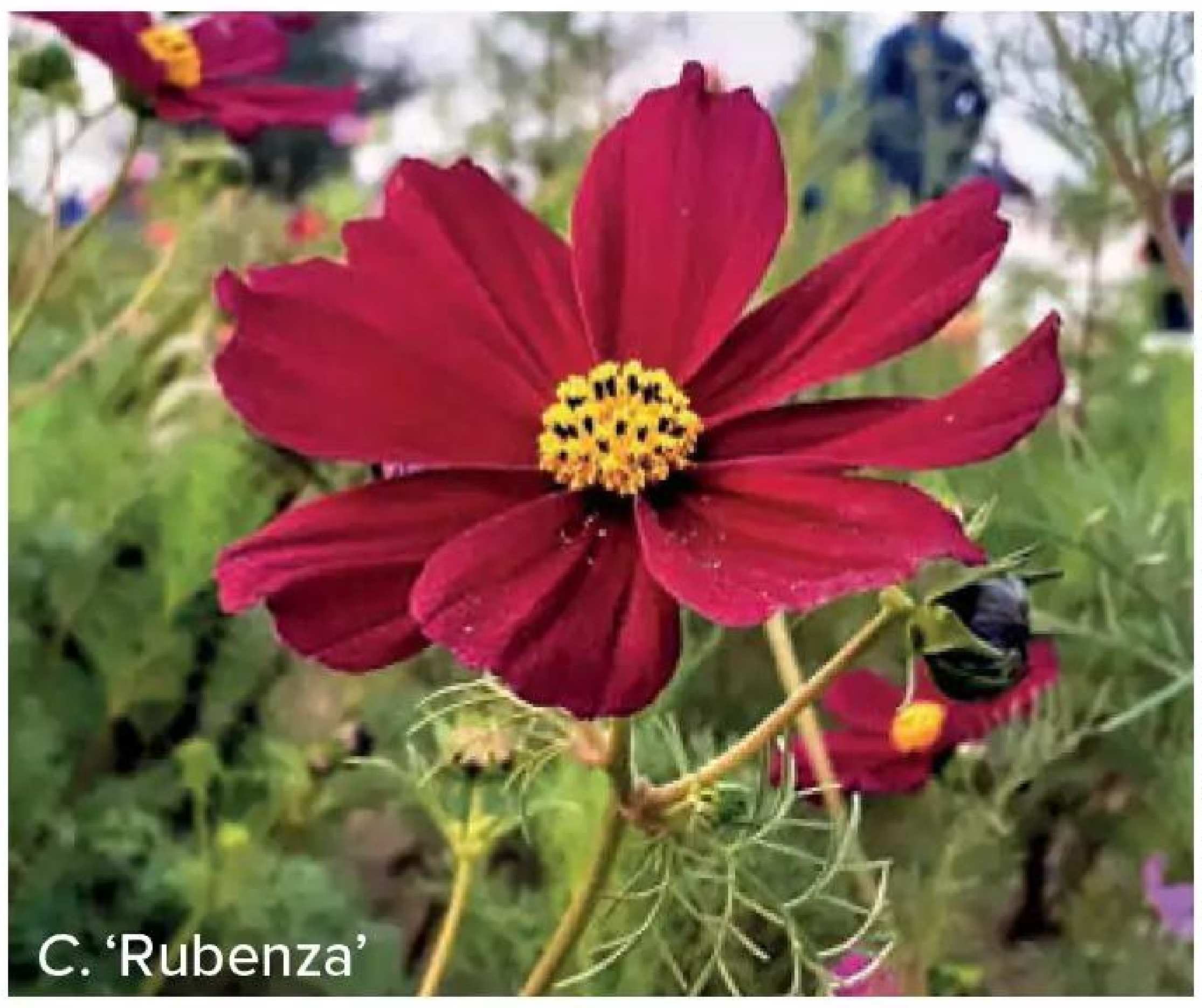
Soil that is too rich can also encourage more foliage and fewer flowers. This is sometimes seen when a row of cut-flower cosmos is grown where brassicas were grown the previous year, and the high-nitrogen fertiliser applied remains in the soil. Some gardeners apply granular fertiliser in spring, before sowing and, while this can be useful on poor soils, if the soil is already high in nutrients it may well encourage too much growth.



C. 'Razzmatazz'



C. 'Xanthos'



C. 'Rubenza'

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GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Planting:** In most of the country, cosmos seeds can be sown outside in late spring where you want the plants to flower. Wait until after the last frost date in your area, then sow the seeds in rows according to the guidance on the seed packet. Cosmos grow in most ordinary garden soils, provided they aren't soggy in summer.

Seeds can also be sown in pots or cells in a propagator or on the windowsill. The seedlings can then be moved into individual pots and grown on protected from chills ready to plant out after the last frost in your area.

✿ **Deadheading:** Deadhead to prolong flowering. Leave a few seedheads ripen to self-seed, and for you to collect. The flowers may not be true, colour-wise, but they'll still be stunning.

Top tip

Cosmos atrosanguineus is not reliably hardy. To ensure its survival over winter, cover the base of the plant with 15cm (6in) layer of straw or other dry material

ALL YEAR ROUND FLOWERS

Autumn glow

Leaves swirl in fiery colours, as the first frosts begin to nip

✿ Bulbs ✿ Verbascum ✿ Anemone Japonica
✿ Rudbeckia ✿ Hesperantha ✿ Asters
✿ Indestructible selection

Autumn-flowering bulbs

Plant: summer/ early autumn

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: -15° C

Propagate: seed/cormlets

These late-flowering bulbs are really important for pollinating insects and it's worth planning ahead to make sure you include some in your garden

In the excitement of ordering new spring-flowering bulbs, don't forget that there are still some spectacular autumn-flowering bulbs. We usually associate autumn with the last blooms of dahlias, asters and salvias before the frosts arrive, and the final fanfare of changing foliage colour in trees and shrubs. But there's still plenty of colour to come from flowering perennials and many of these are bulbs like crocus and nerines. They are hardy perennials that will stick around in the right conditions.

Flowering in October

One of these is the autumn crocus, which is probably the most familiar of the late-flowering bulbs. The best known species include the saffron crocus, *Crocus sativus*, and *Crocus speciosus*, both of which flower into October fairly quickly after planting. The flowers are quite small and the distinguishing feature between autumn and spring flowering crocus is that the leaves don't appear until later in the growth cycle. These autumn-flowering crocus are often confused with colchicums. The key difference

Top tip

- Most autumn bulbs prefer full sun to partial shade
- Colchicum are toxic if eaten. Wear gloves when handling
- In colder areas, consider adding a layer of mulch for winter protection
- Allow foliage to die back naturally after flowering to feed the bulb for next year

between them is the size and quantity of the flowers. Each colchicum bulb produces three-five stems and the flowers are bigger and more open than the goblet form of crocus blooms. Also, colchicums are bigger below ground and these large bulbs can be grown indoors in the same way you might force a hyacinth bulb. Colchicums will cope with shadier areas, so are a better choice for planting under trees and shrubs.

Low-growing bulbs

If you want a carpet of autumn colour to mirror spring, plant low-growing bulbs that share similar growing conditions to *Crocus speciosus* and these will naturalise over time. Many of the late bloomers hail from sunny, rocky, alpine areas and you can group them to create a stunning tapestry. These might include magenta-pink hardy cyclamen, and the brilliant yellow of *Sternbergia lutea*. They will also work in containers – choose ones of the same colour or material and plant bulbs in different sized pots to group together.

PLANTING

SHUTTERSTOCK

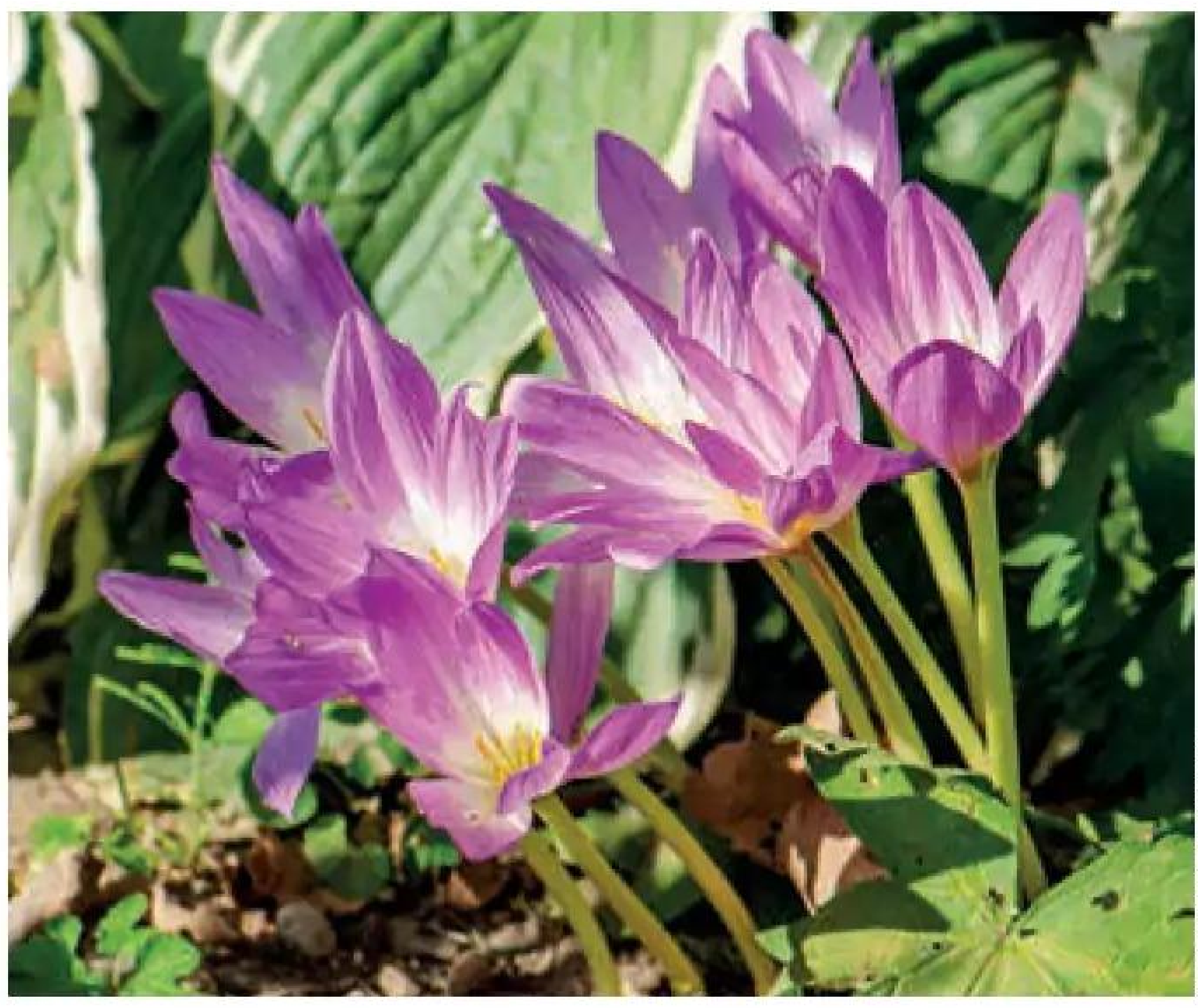
Plant colchicums in pots indoors.

Some late-flowering bulbs and tubers need to be planted in spring and early summer. This gives them a summer season of growth before you reap the benefits of flowers in autumn. Typically, these are nerines, dahlias, crocosmia and begonias. However, there are some bulbs with a relatively short planting-to-bloom period that can be planted from midsummer onwards. Several of the autumn crocus species can be planted through September and will flower fairly quickly, within a month to six weeks. You can also plant large-bulbed colchicums indoors, as you would do hyacinths in a vase, and they make a great table decoration.

Did you know...

The one bulb that's known as the autumn daffodil, *Sternbergia lutea*, is not actually a narcissus, despite being yellow and closely related in botanical family terms

3 COLCHICUMS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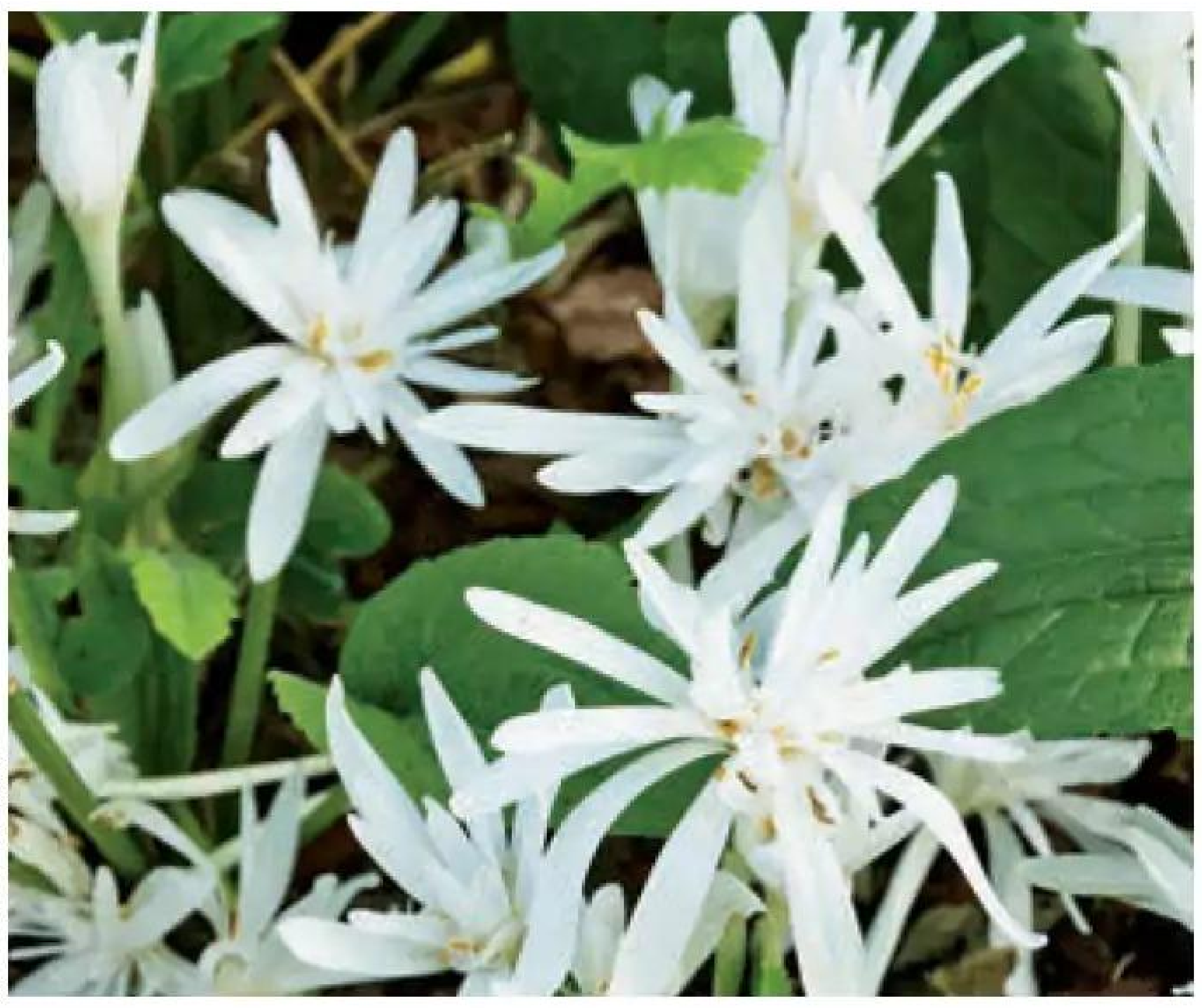
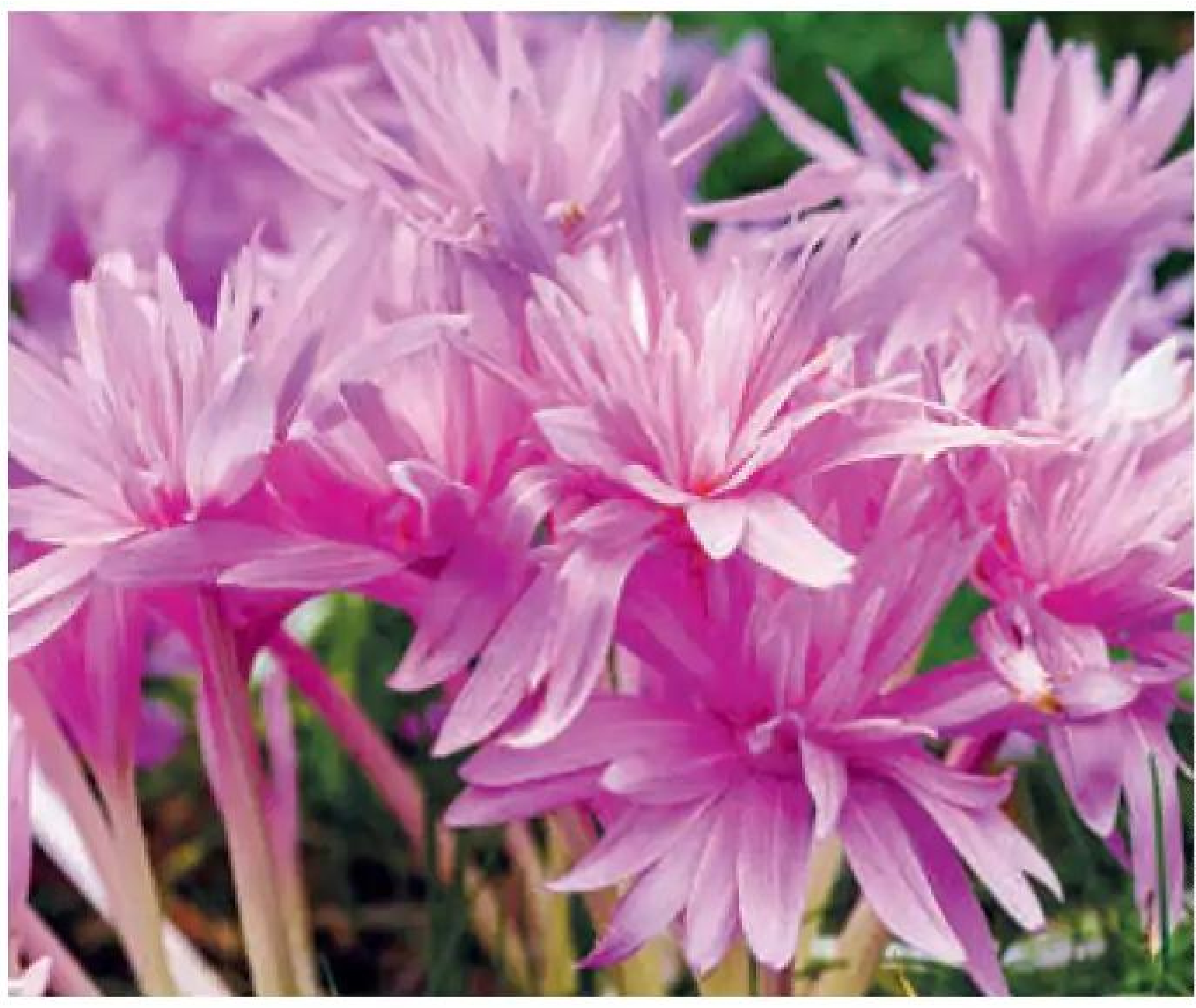
***Colchicum* 'The Giant'**
Easy to mistake for crocuses, these appear in a spray of up to 10 blooms from one large bulb. This is one of the taller colchicums, which are also known as 'meadow saffron'. They are good plants for late-season pollinators and will readily naturalise once planted into borders or containers. **HxS:** 8x12in (20x30cm).



***Colchicum autumnale* 'Alboplenum'**
Colchicums are often referred to as autumn crocus. However, they are a separate species, identifiable by larger flowers on short stems – foliage appears in spring – which gives them their common name of 'naked ladies'. Ideal for planting in moist but well-drained soil in part sun or shade. **H&S:** 6in (15cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

***Colchicum* 'Waterlily'**
This is a stunning double flower, which really does resemble a waterlily more than a crocus. The flowers appear from September to October, and make a dazzling display when planted to carpet areas under trees and shrubs or at the shady fringes of a woodland planting scheme. **HxS:** 6x12in (15x30cm).

Galanthus reginae-olgae **subsp.** ***reginae-olgae***
Flowering from mid-September, flowers appearsbefore the leaves. Cultivars include 'Blanc de Chine' and 'Pink Panther'. **HxS:** 6x12in (15x30cm).

Cyclamen hederifolium
The classic autumn-flowering hardy cyclamen, with flowers appearing as early as late August. The later marbled foliage creates a beautiful patterned carpet. **HxS:** 6x12in (15x30cm).

Galanthus elwesii **var.** ***monostictus***
Another autumn snowdrop, this Turkish species flowers in October. Tolerates a range of soils and part shade, but likes sharp drainage. Will naturalise. **HxS:** 6x12in (15x30cm)

Sternbergia lutea
Often referred to as the winter daffodil, this is related to narcissus. Bulbs can be planted into September and will flower soon after. Great planted in large groups. **H&S:** 6in (15cm).

Acis autumnalis
The 'autumn snowflake' flowers from August, September and beyond. Good for gravel gardens and containers. Planted in August, it flowers soon afterwards. **H&S:** 9in (22cm).

Hesperantha coccinea
This starts flowering in August and continues through the autumn. Popular cultivars include the pale-pink 'Mrs Hegarty'. Bulbs can be planted through summer **HxS:** 2x1ft (60x30cm).

3 NERINES

Nerine bowdenii **'Alba'**
This pure-white version combines well with blue and purple-flowering plants such as caryopteris and Salvia 'Amistad'. Plant in full sun and well-grained soil. **HxS:** 18x12in (45x30cm).

SHUTTERSTOCK

Nerine bowdenii **'Vesta'**
A great drought-tolerant bulb, flowering from September to November. Prefers a sheltered spot and mulch for winter protection. **HxS**: 2ftx10in (60x20cm).

GETTY

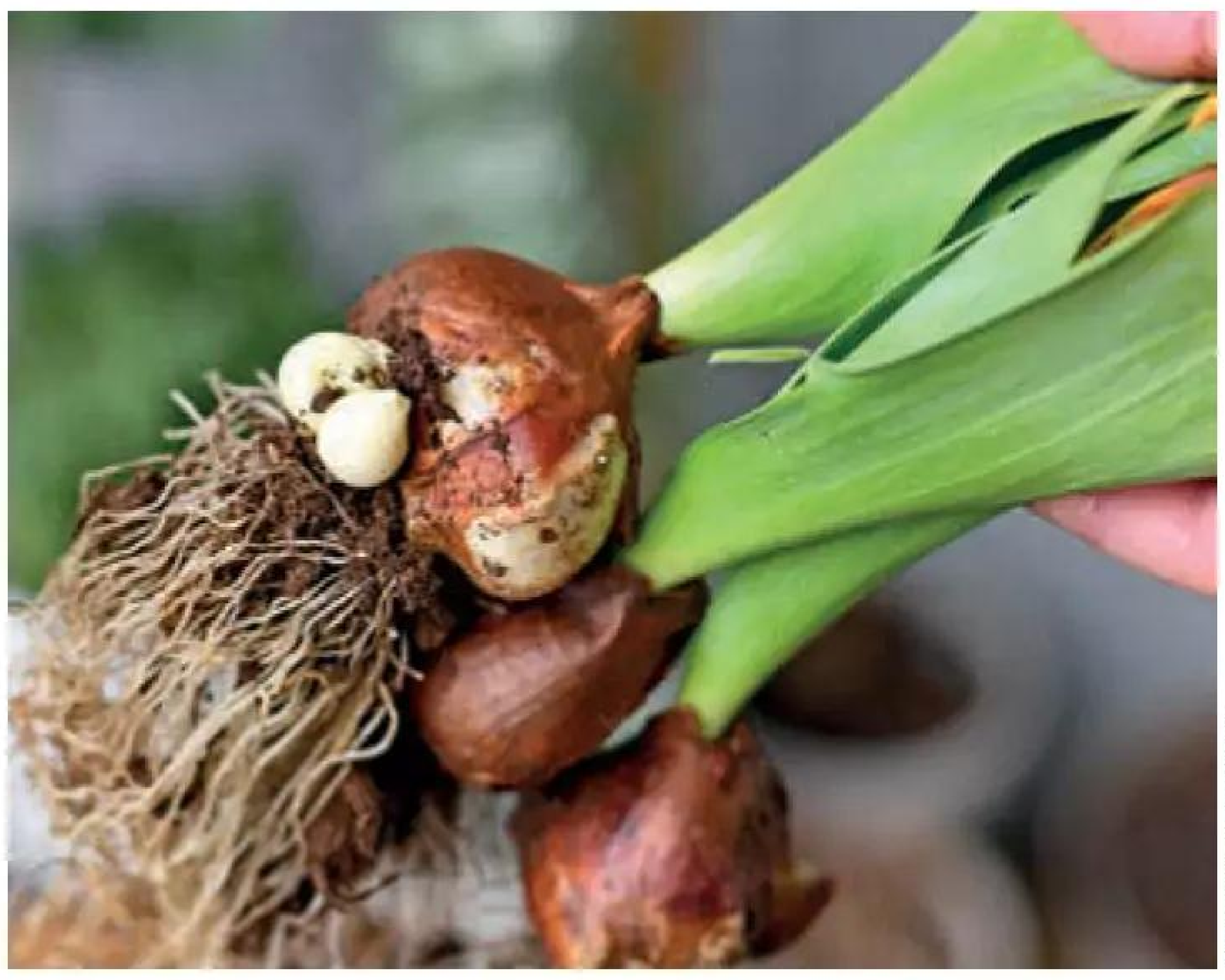
Nerine bowdenii
The most hardy of the nerines and most of the reliable garden cultivars come from this plant. Nerines make great cut flowers, Requires hot, well-drained conditions. **HxS:**18x6in(45x15cm).

GROWING ADVICE

Some bulbs produce small blubs called offsets, which is how they spread naturally. If you lift the bulb, you can remove these and pot them on. It can take a couple of years for smaller bulbs to grow big enough to flower. Big offsets from large bulbs can be planted direct into the gound. The advantage of using offests to increase the number of plants is that they're identical to the parent plant.

Seeds are less reliable in terms of coming true to type, but they are easy to grow. Wait for the seedhad to dry out, then collect the seeds and sow them thinly on the surface of some seed compost. Lightly cover with fine grit and keep in a a cold frame or unheated greenhouse over the winter, making sure they're kept moist. Some species will germinate very quickly, others won't be obvious until the spring. Pot them up in the second year and grow on until big enough to plant out.

Autumn bulbs can be planted in borders,grass and containers, just like their spring counterparts. You can keep bulbs in pots from year to year. Make sure to allow the foliage to die back naturally. You might find that productivity slows down a little after a few years so it's a good idea, as with most container-grown plants, to refresh the compost at least once a year. If you have limited storage space for unproductive pots, you can take the bulbs out to reuse. Wait until the foliage has died back, then remove the bulbs, dry them out thoroughly and store in a brown paper bag in a chilled, dry area until it's time to plant them again.



SHUTTERSTOCK

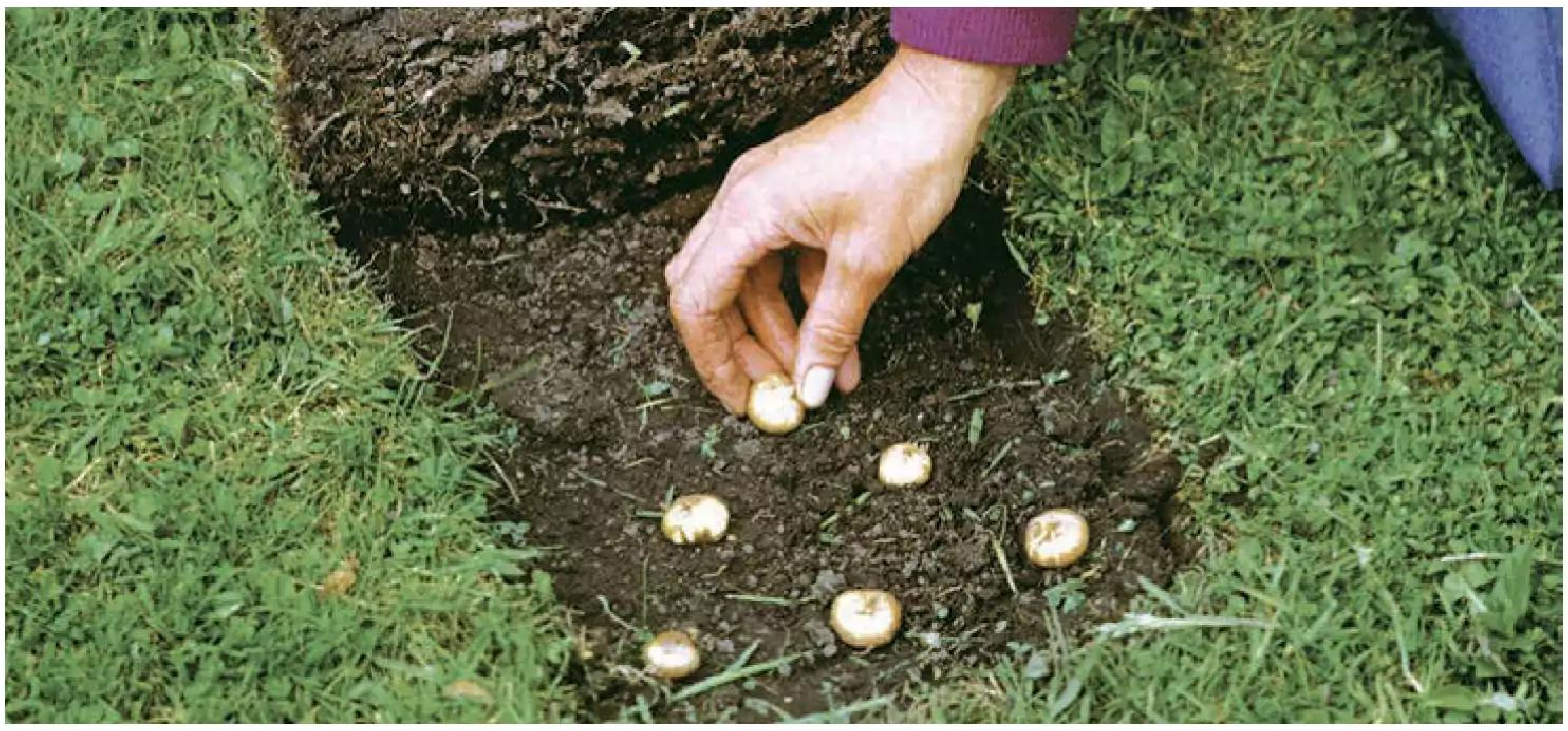
Bulb success

Good care will work wonders

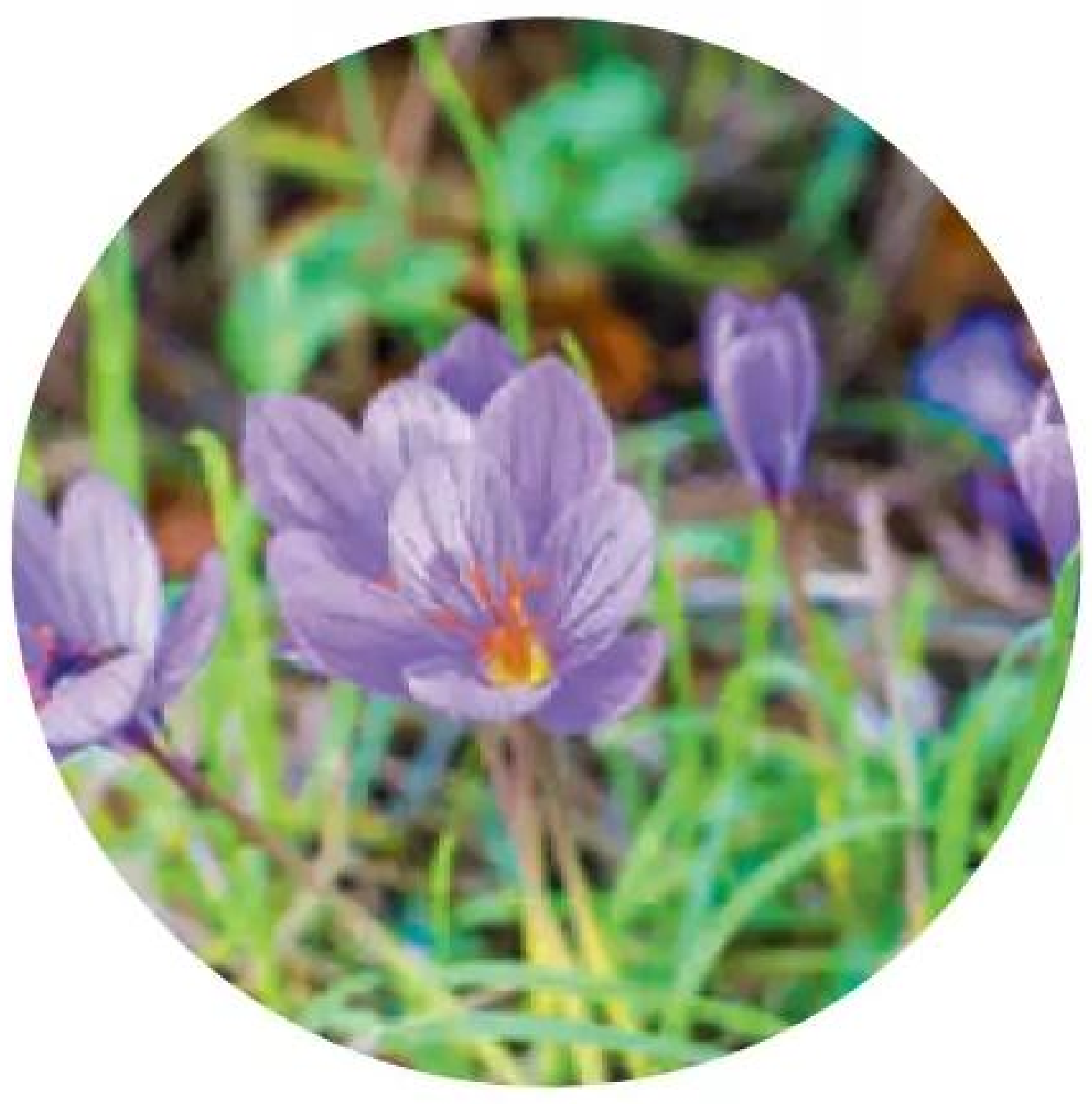
- Deadhead regularly so the plant puts its energy into bulb growth rather than creating seeds.
- Let the leaves die down naturally and never knot them, as it will reduce the chances of good flowering next year.
- Remember to water and feed bulbs after flowering so they will bulk up for next year.

How to... Grow bulbs in grass

Plant bulbs in grass in autumn for naturalisation. Choose areas where the grass can be left unmown until the bulb foliage has died back naturally (6-8 weeks after flowering). Remove a piece of turf, place the bulbs in position and replace the turf. Water well.

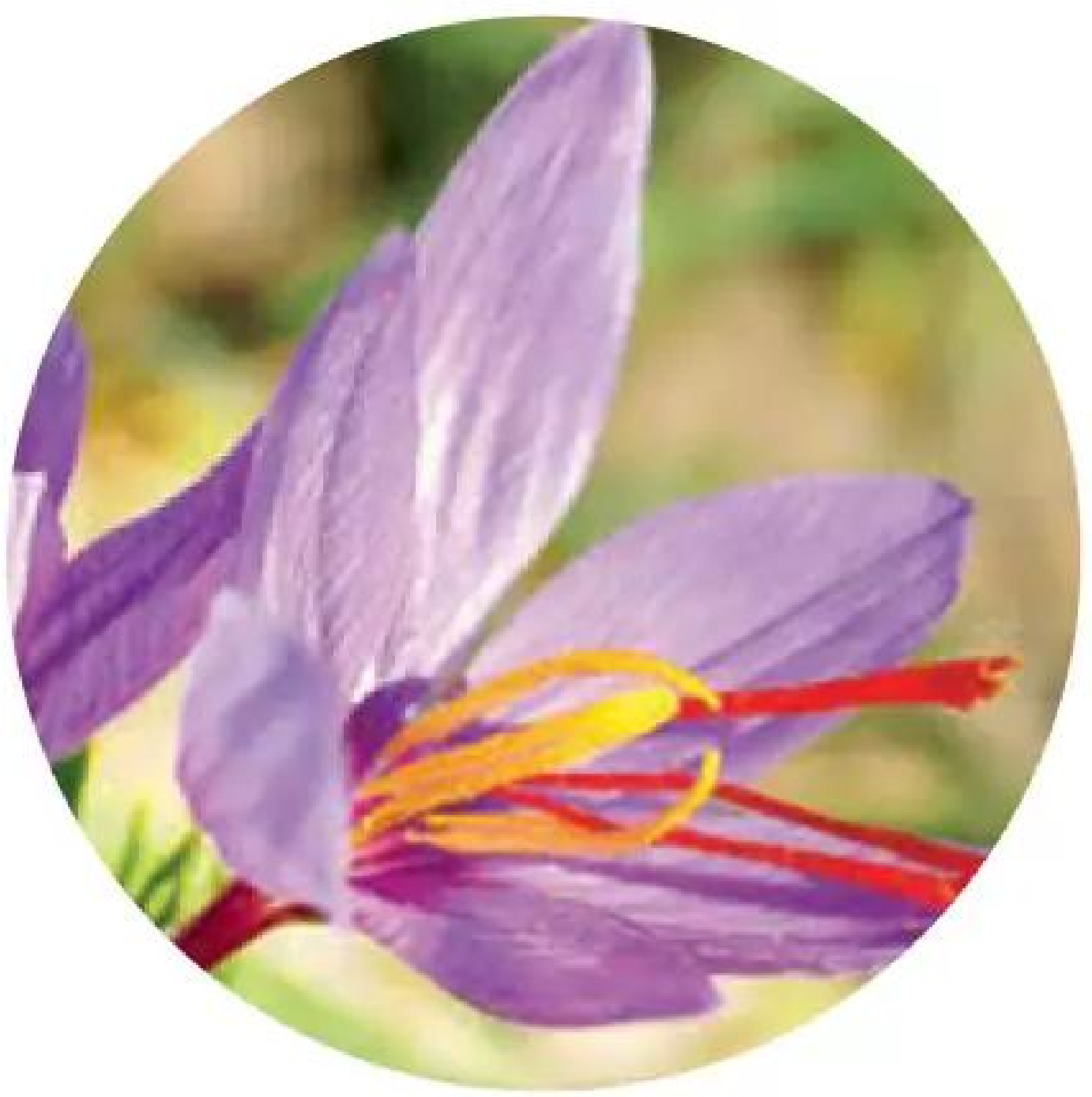


3 autumn crocuses



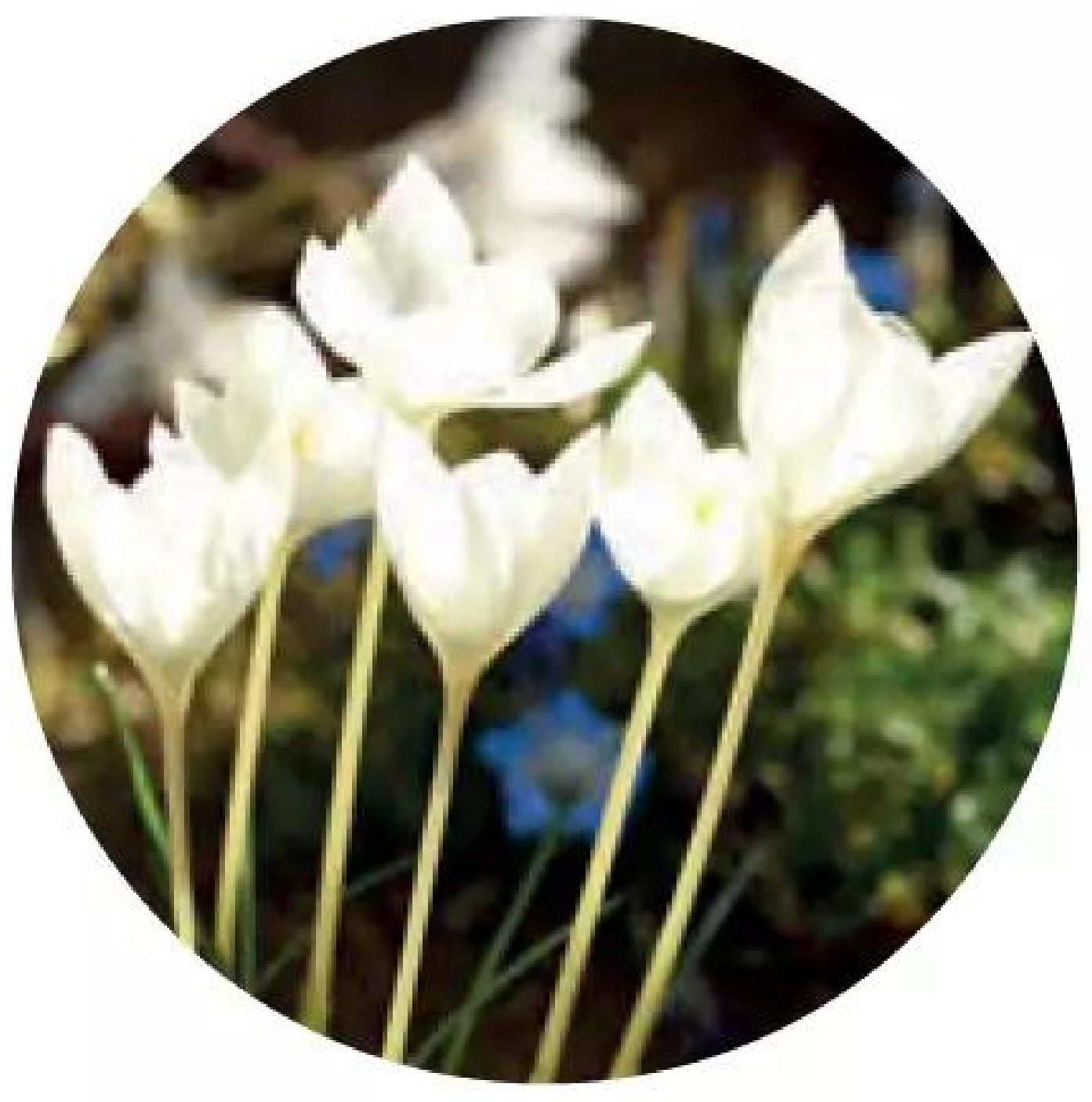
Crocus speciosus

Very vigorous and will naturalise into beautiful drifts. 'Albus' is a white-flowering variety, while 'Conqueror'(shown) is a rich deep-purple. These are great plants for late-season pollinators. H&S: 5in (10cm).



Crocus sativus

This classic autumn-flowering crocus can be planted in September and flowers within 6-10 weeks. The rich-golden stigmas are used for saffron. H&S: 5in (10cm).



SHUTTERSTOCK

Crocus goulimyi

Quite rare, this is native to Greece. It needs to be planted in full sun and sharply drained soil. Pale-lilac flowers on long stems in October. The white flowering version is 'Mani', shown, and is even rarer. H&S: 4in (10cm).

Mullein
Verbascum

Plant: spring/autumn
Position: full sun
Hardiness: -15°C
Propagate: seeds or root cuttings

With their soft felty leaves and spires of varying colours, use verbascums to add architectural height and drama

Verbascums are fabulous for bringing vertical height and colour to mixed borders, and are perfect for classic cottage-garden planting schemes. If you're looking for height to add to your borders, verbascum is one of the best plant choices to take you from early summer through to its last throes. It combines cottage-garden prettiness with architectural drama and, with timely flowers arriving in late May, it's not surprising that this stylish plant often graces Chelsea Flower Show gardens.

Yet verbascums will happily find a home in everyday garden borders, too. Whether you're cultivating an exuberant cottage-garden look, or a sparser, drought-tolerant, gravel garden style, these plants will provide long-lasting summer colour.

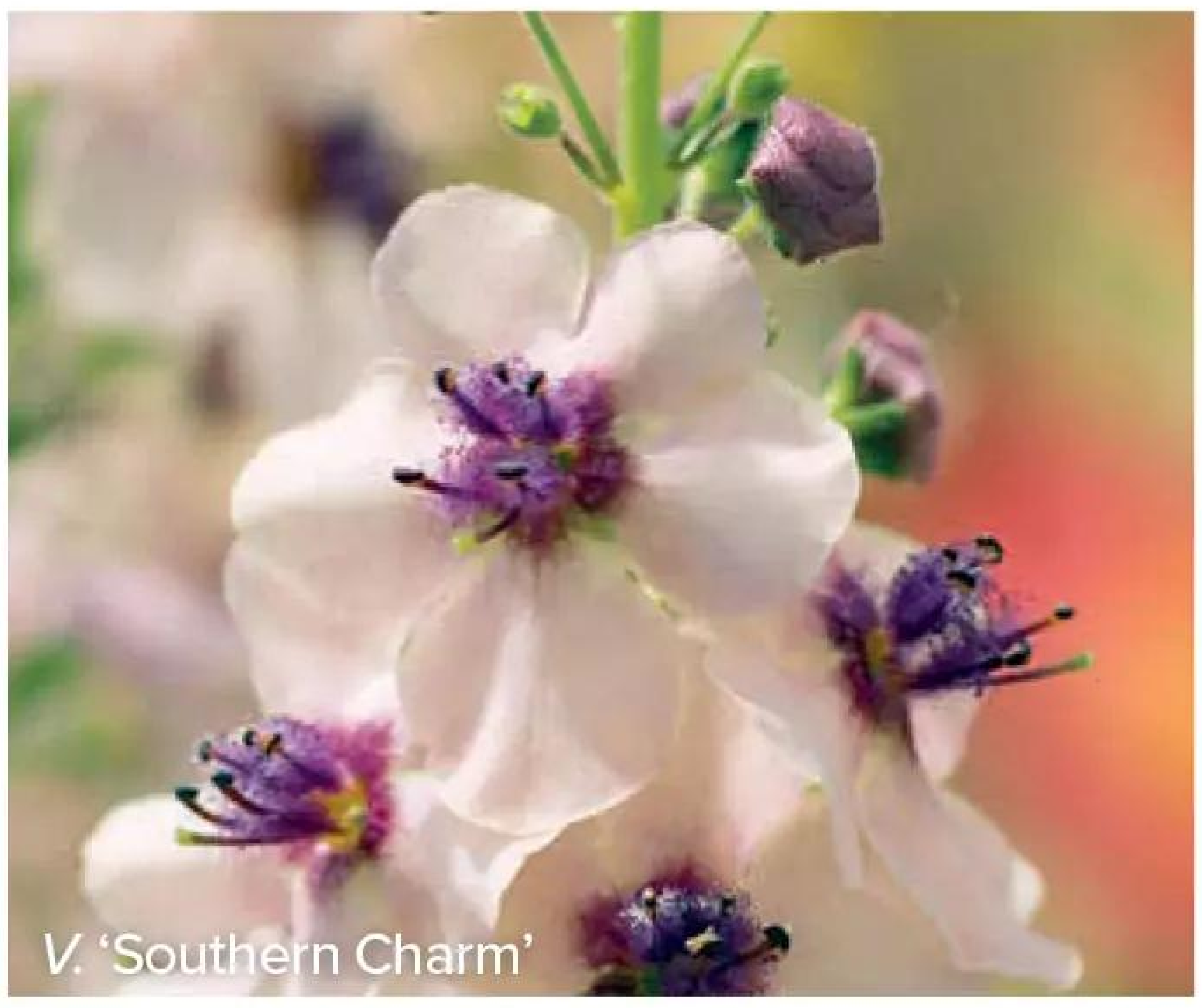
Verbascums can be short-lived hardy perennial plants or biennials that give you great foliage interest in the first season followed by colourful blooms the next summer. They range in height from approximately 2ft (60cm) to well over 6ft (2m). Tall specimens like *V. thapsus*, *V. olympicum*, or *V. bombyciferum* with its sulphur-yellow flowers and felted leaves grow to well over 6ft (2m). Use these mid-border or at the back, or exploit their architectural form in gravel plantings. Many of the chaixii and phoenicium types will work well towards the front of borders or in larger containers.

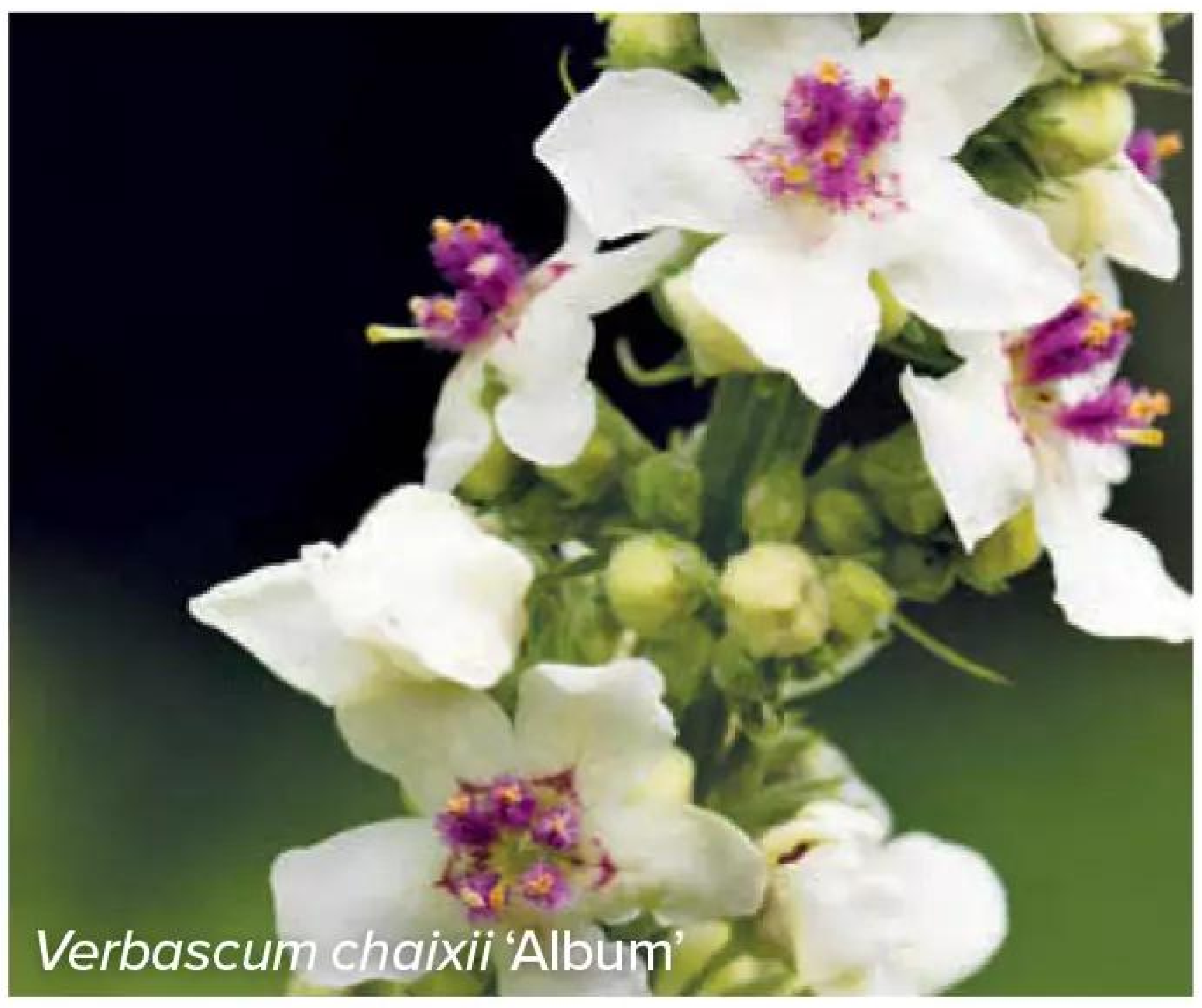
Verbascums work well in combination with other summer verticals such as delphiniums, hollyhocks and foxgloves. They also make good companions for many summer-flowering perennials.

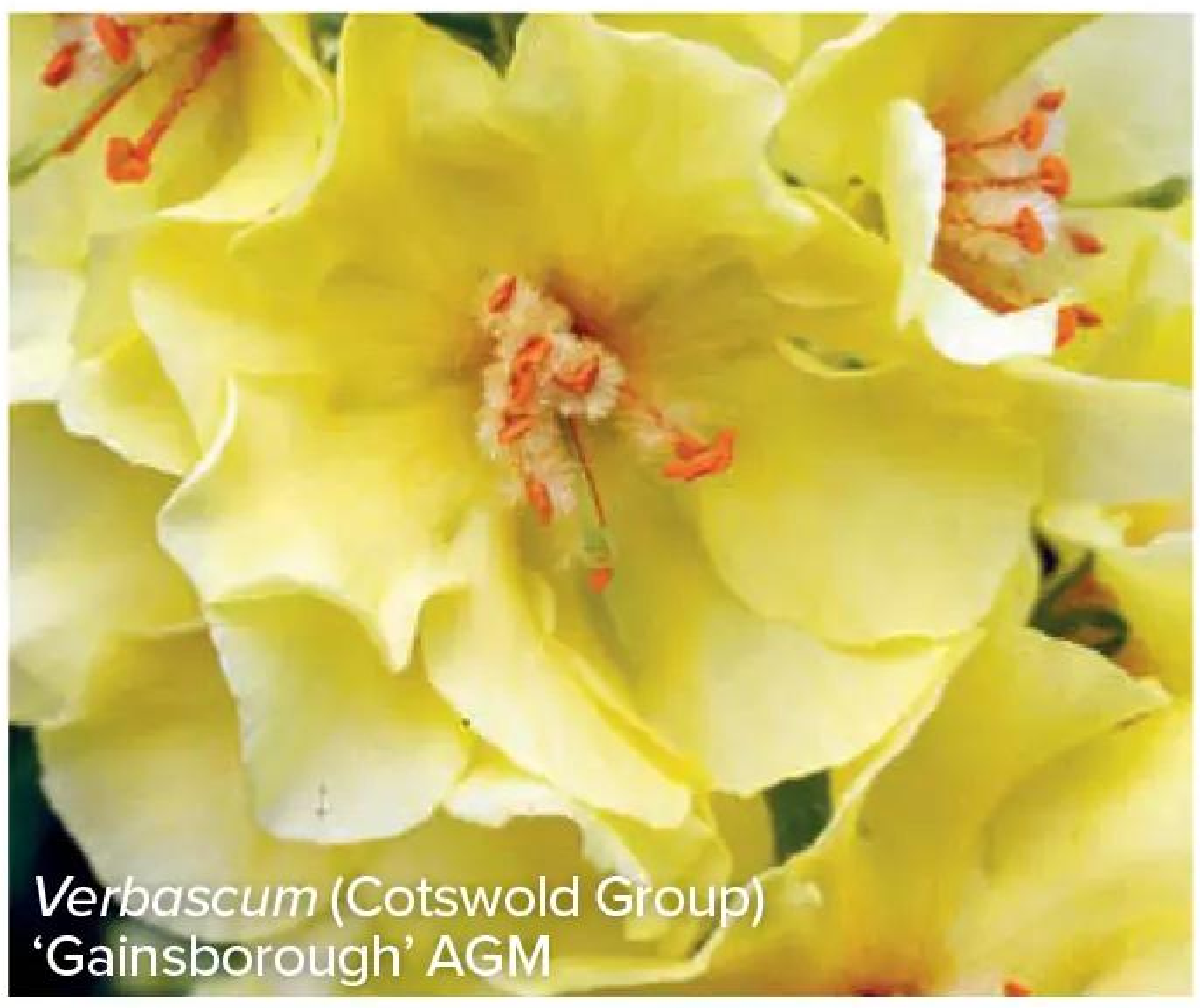
Top tips

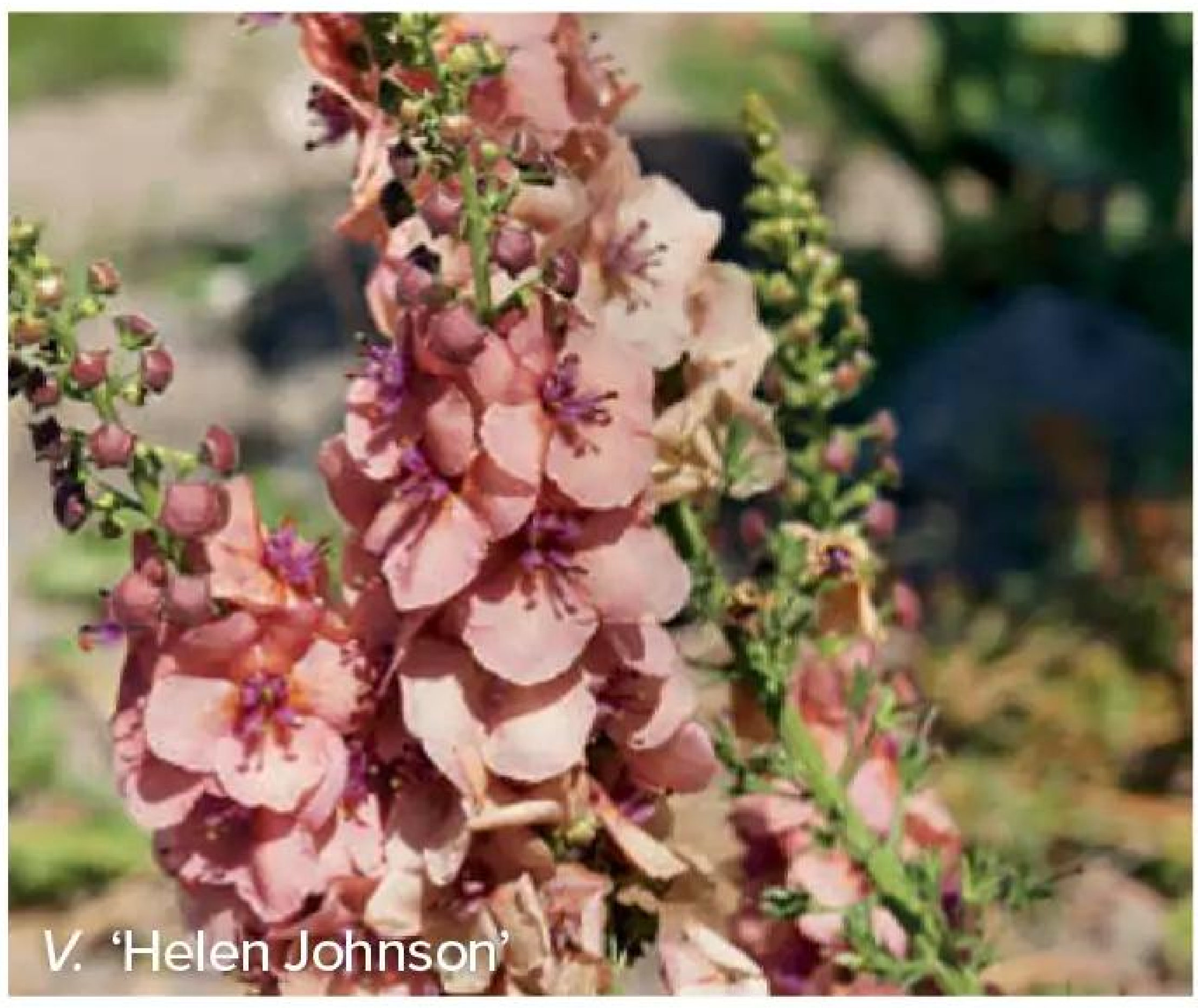
- Cut back flowering spikes to encourage more blooms and control self-seeding
- Use in combination with summer perennials like cardoons and salvias
- Repeat through borders to lead the view along or down the garden

Did you know... Verbascums are also known as mullein and have long been used as a herbal remedy for respiratory problems and urinary tract infections. They're called 'the Candlewick plant' as the downy foliage was used to make wicks in oil lamps before cotton


V. 'Southern Charm'


Verbascum chaixii 'Album'


Verbascum (Cotswold Group) 'Gainsborough' AGM


V. 'Helen Johnson'

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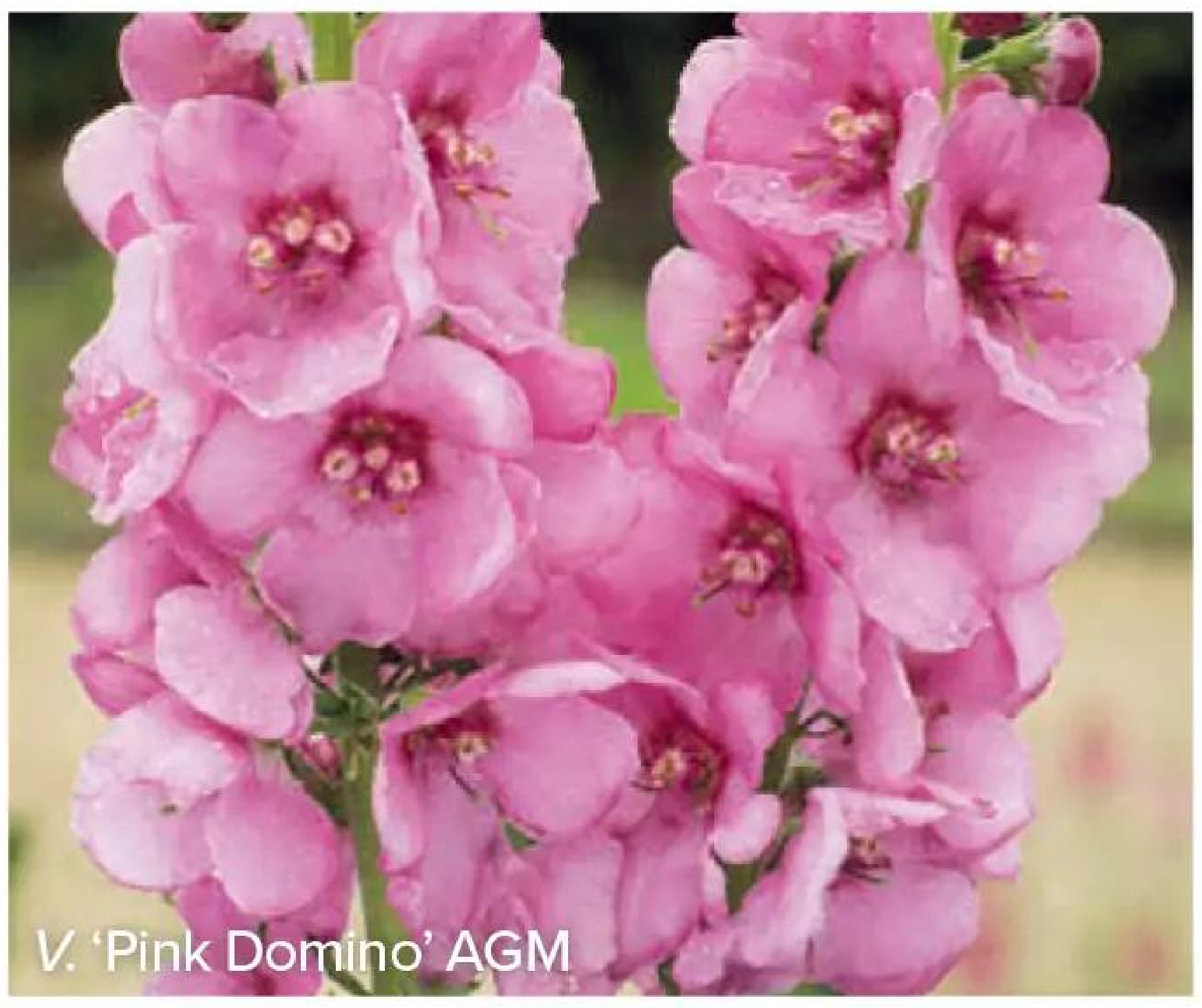
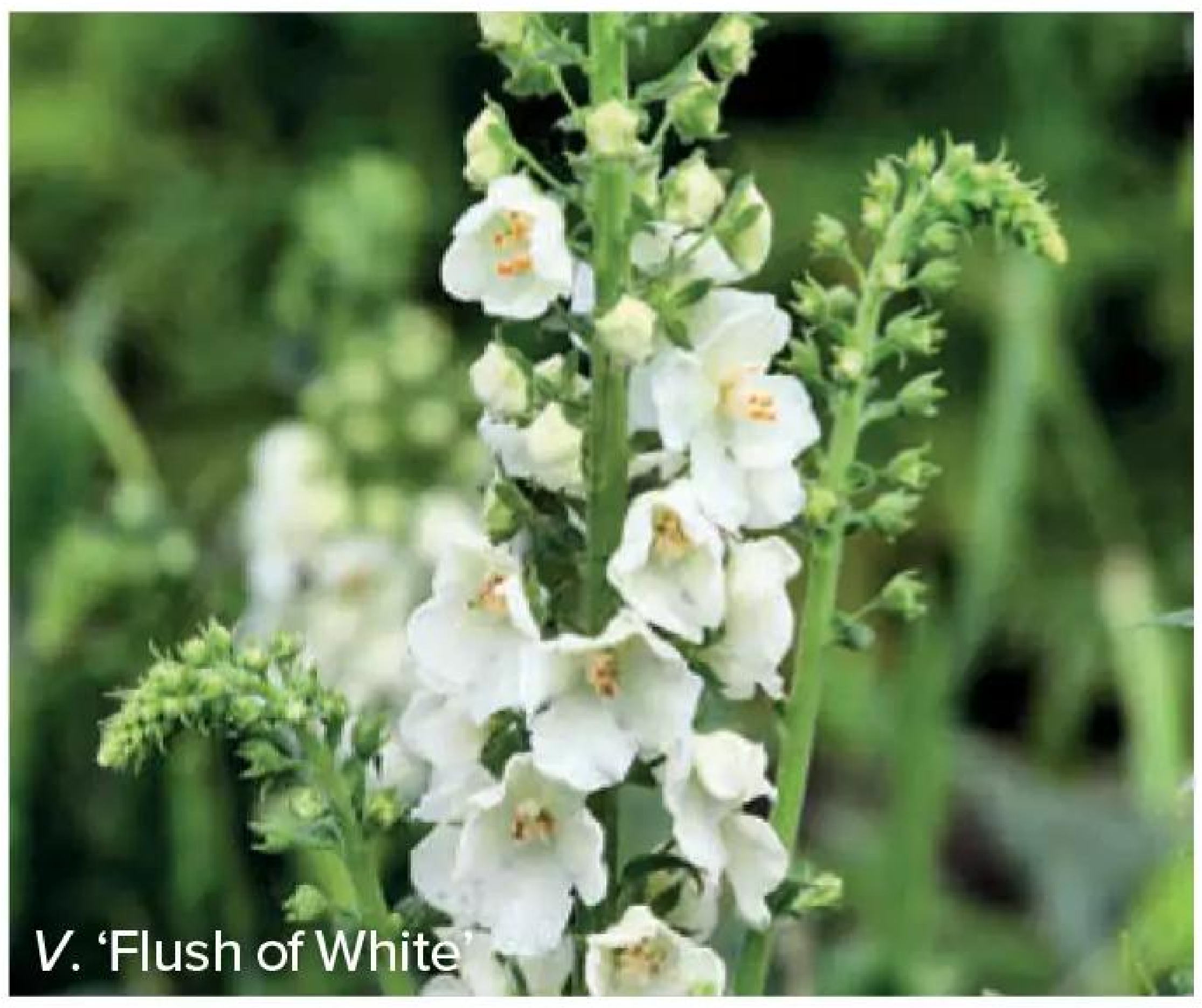
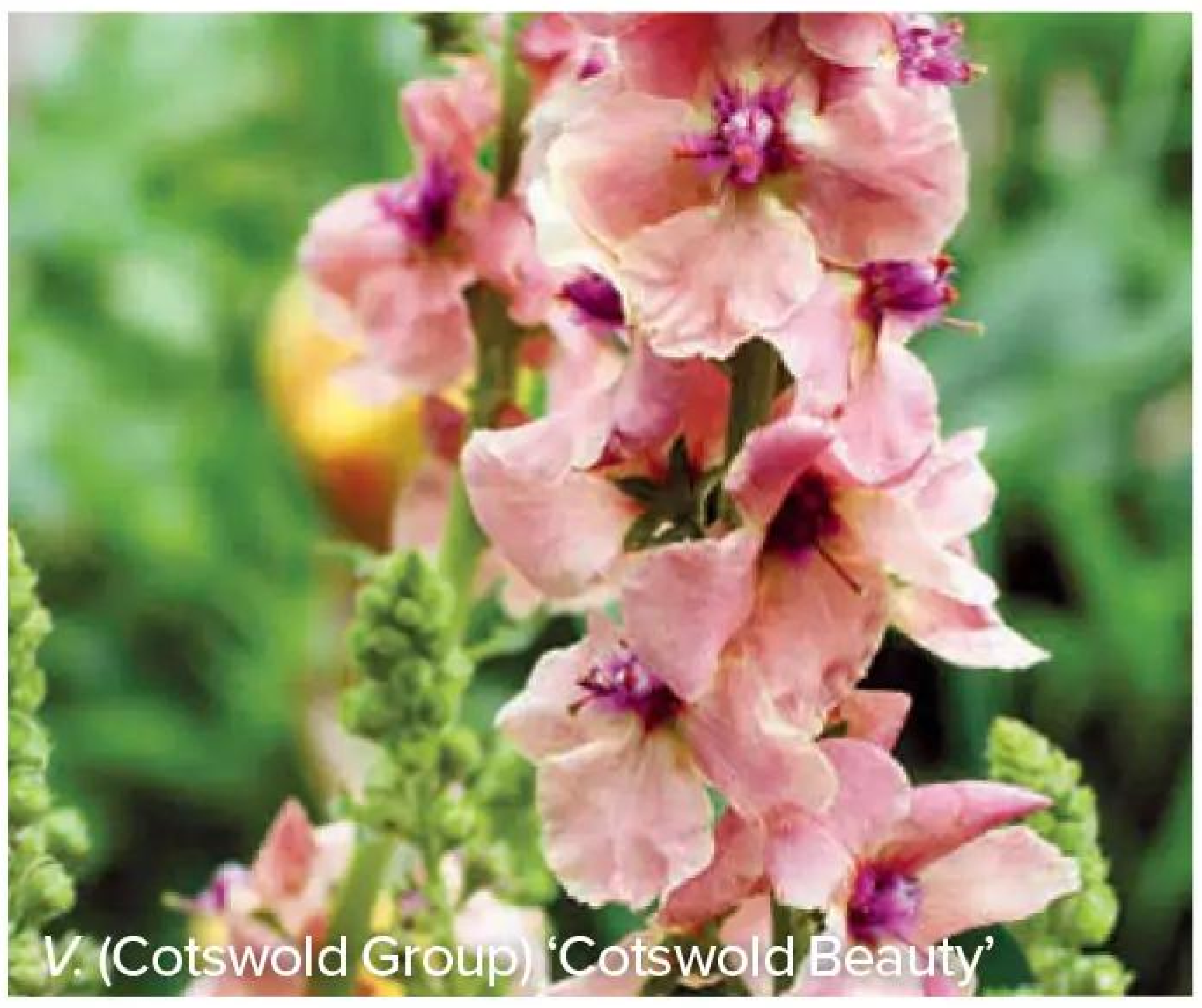
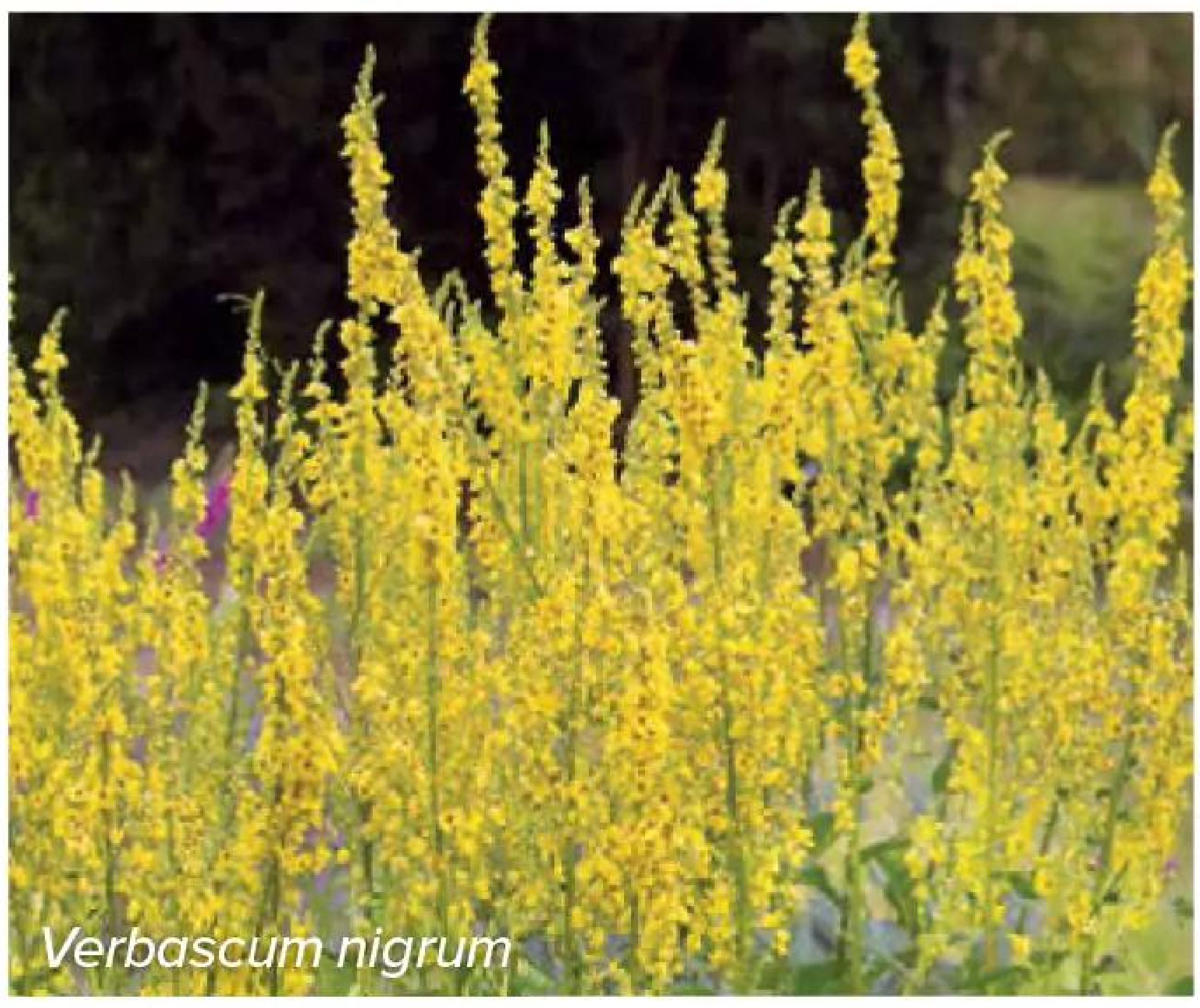

V. 'Pink Domino' AGM


V. 'Flush of White'


V. (Cotswold Group) 'Cotswold Beauty'


Verbascum nigrum

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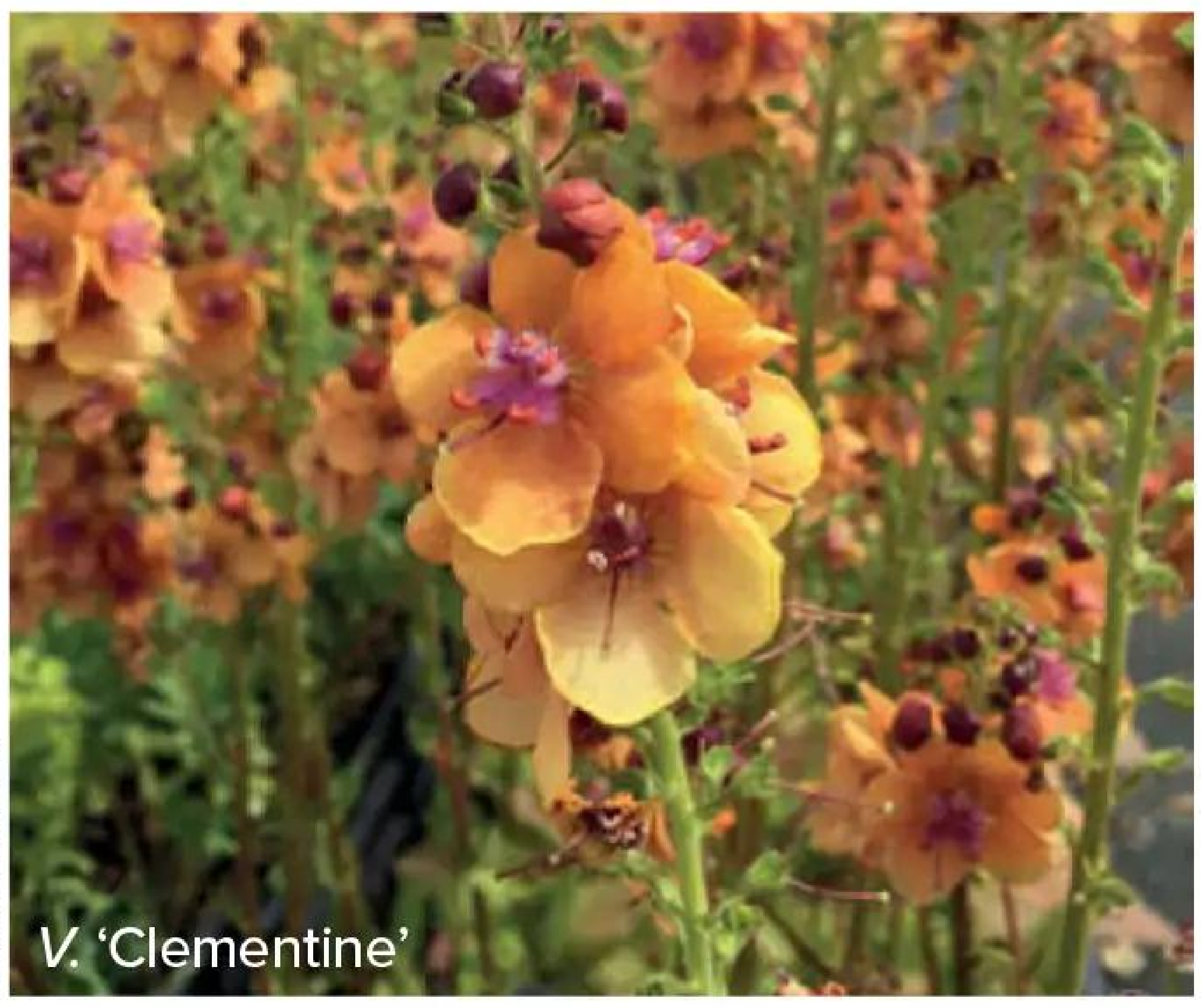

V. 'Clementine'

SHUTTERSTOCK

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** Verbascums can be grown in a range of soils from fertile borders to gravel gardens. They prefer full sun and well-drained soil. Mediterranean types thrive in sharply drained, neutral to alkaline soil and work well in gravel or scree gardens. Native species are more tolerant of loamy or clay soils.

✿ **Planting:** Plant in spring or autumn. Prepare the soil by ensuring good drainage, especially for Mediterranean types. Space plants according to their expected mature size.

✿ **Care:** Most verbascums are drought-tolerant once established, thanks to their long tap roots. Water during dry spells in the first year. Deadhead regularly to encourage more flowers and prevent excessive self-seeding.

✿ **Propagation:** Many verbascums self-seed freely. You can also save seeds to sow for succession. For sterile hybrids, propagate by root cuttings in late winter or early spring. Select roots about 2-4in (5-10cm) long, cut into small sections, and plant in sandy, gritty compost.

Pests & diseases

Verbascums are generally robust plants but can be susceptible to powdery mildew in humid conditions. Ensure good air circulation to prevent this. Slugs and snails may damage young plants. The mullein moth (*Cucullia verbasci*) can be a significant pest for verbascums. The caterpillars of this moth feed on the leaves and flowers, potentially causing substantial damage. Keep an eye out for these caterpillars, especially in late spring and early summer, and remove them by hand if spotted.

Japanese anemone

Anemone japonica

Plant: spring

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: <-20°C

Propagate: division/root cuttings

Stately thin stems hold dainty flowers that glow at dusk, adding colour and elegance to your autumn garden

For beautiful late-flowering perennials that light up shadier areas of your borders, choose Japanese anemones to take your garden into autumn. As the light slips at the end of summer, these elegant plants bring a luminosity to the fading light of late summer and early autumn days with their cool, pale blooms.

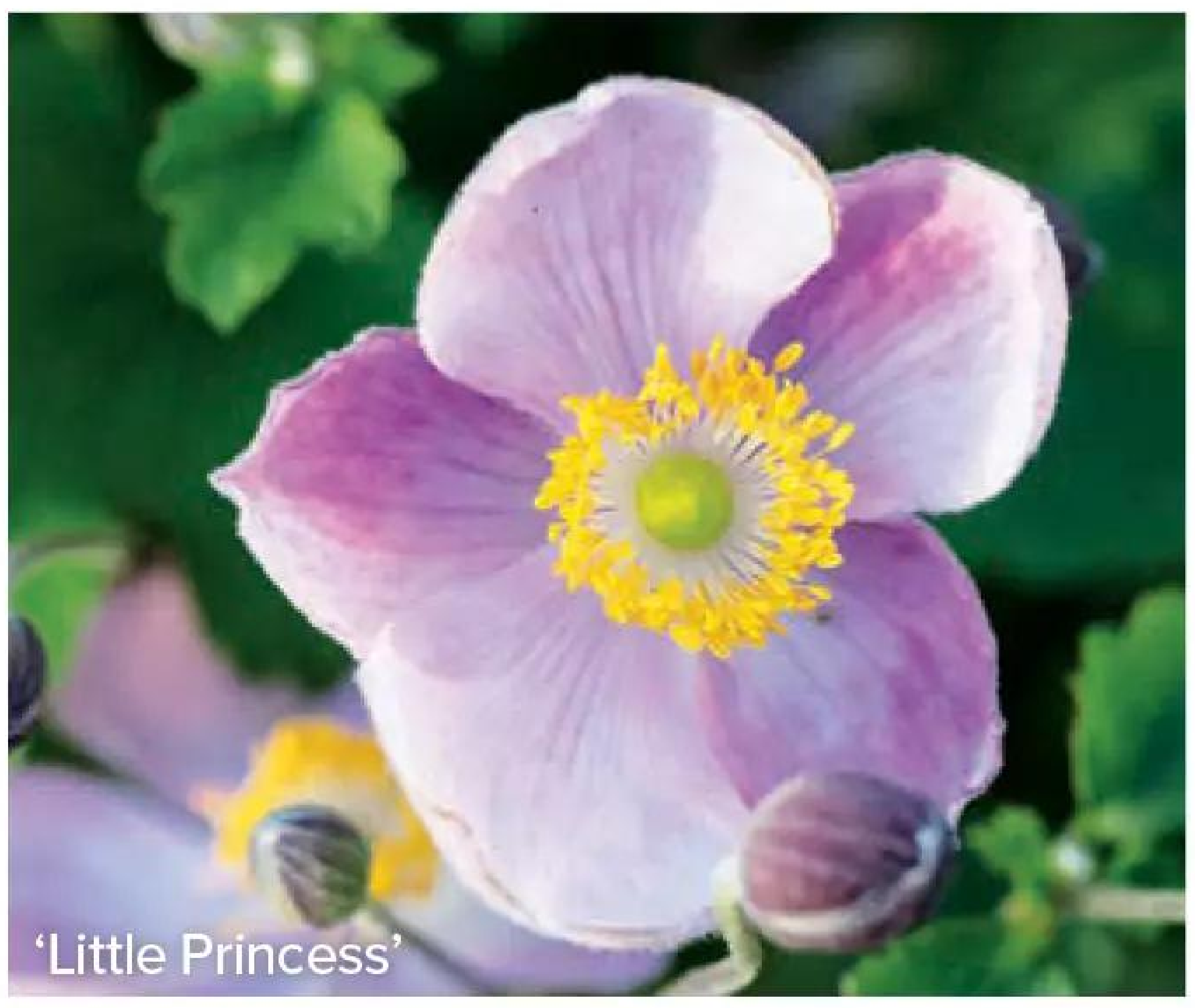
Also known as windflowers for their airy habit, Japanese anemones are guaranteed to light up shadier areas of your borders. They are supremely elegant in shades of pure white through the palest pink and deeper rose tints. Generally peaking during August and September, these plants offer around 120 varieties to choose from. Many grow to heights of around 5ft (1.5m), with some of the newer hybrids coming in a more compact form.

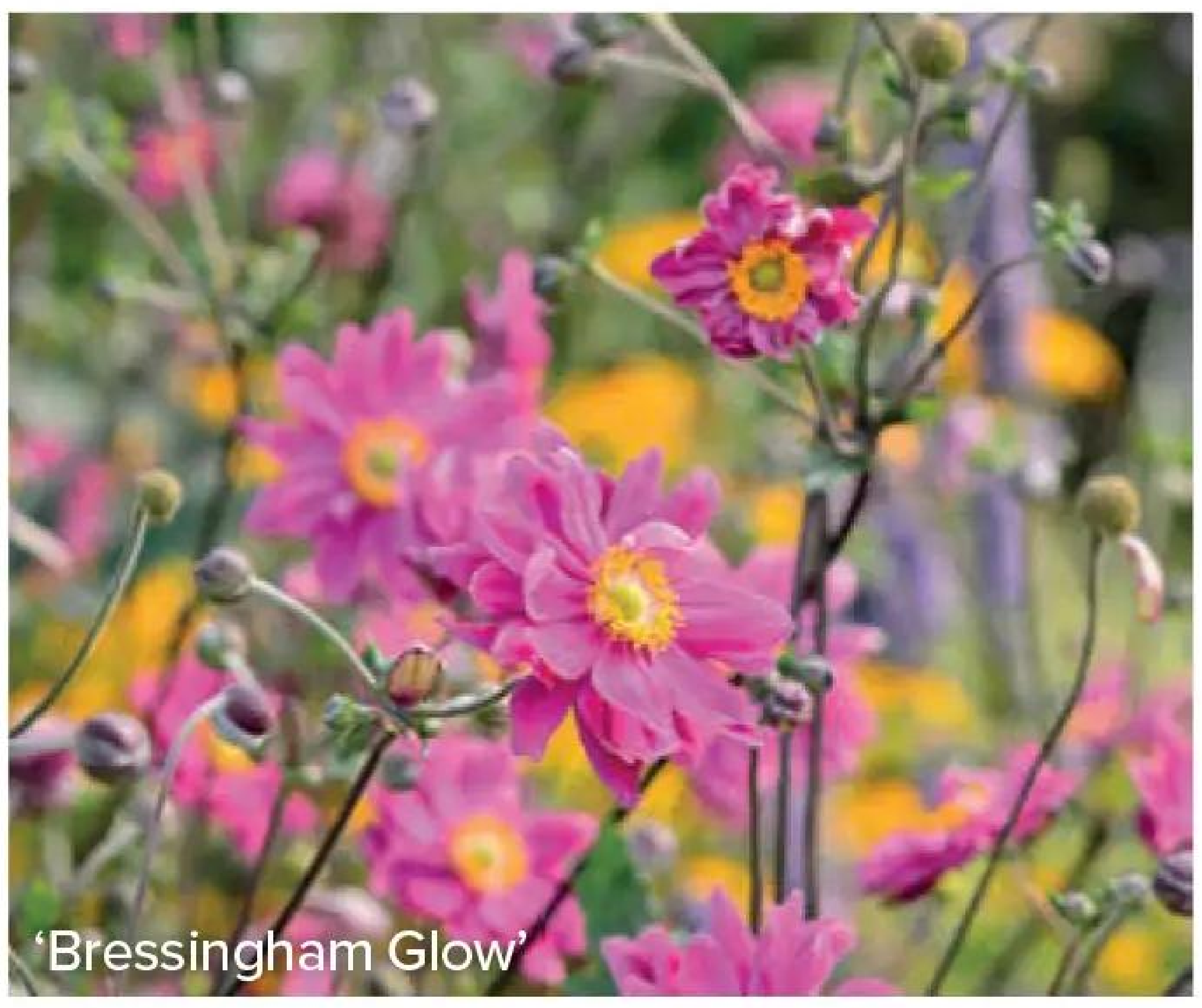
Most hybrids are derived from *Anemone hupehensis* and *Anemone hybrida*, with *Anemone x hybrida* crosses offering a great choice for end of summer and early autumn blooming. There are numerous historic cultivars, including the classic Victorian 'Honorine Jobert'. Recent breeding has evolved varieties more suitable for container growing and for a longer flowering season that will give you Japanese anemones from mid-summer through to autumn and the first frosts.

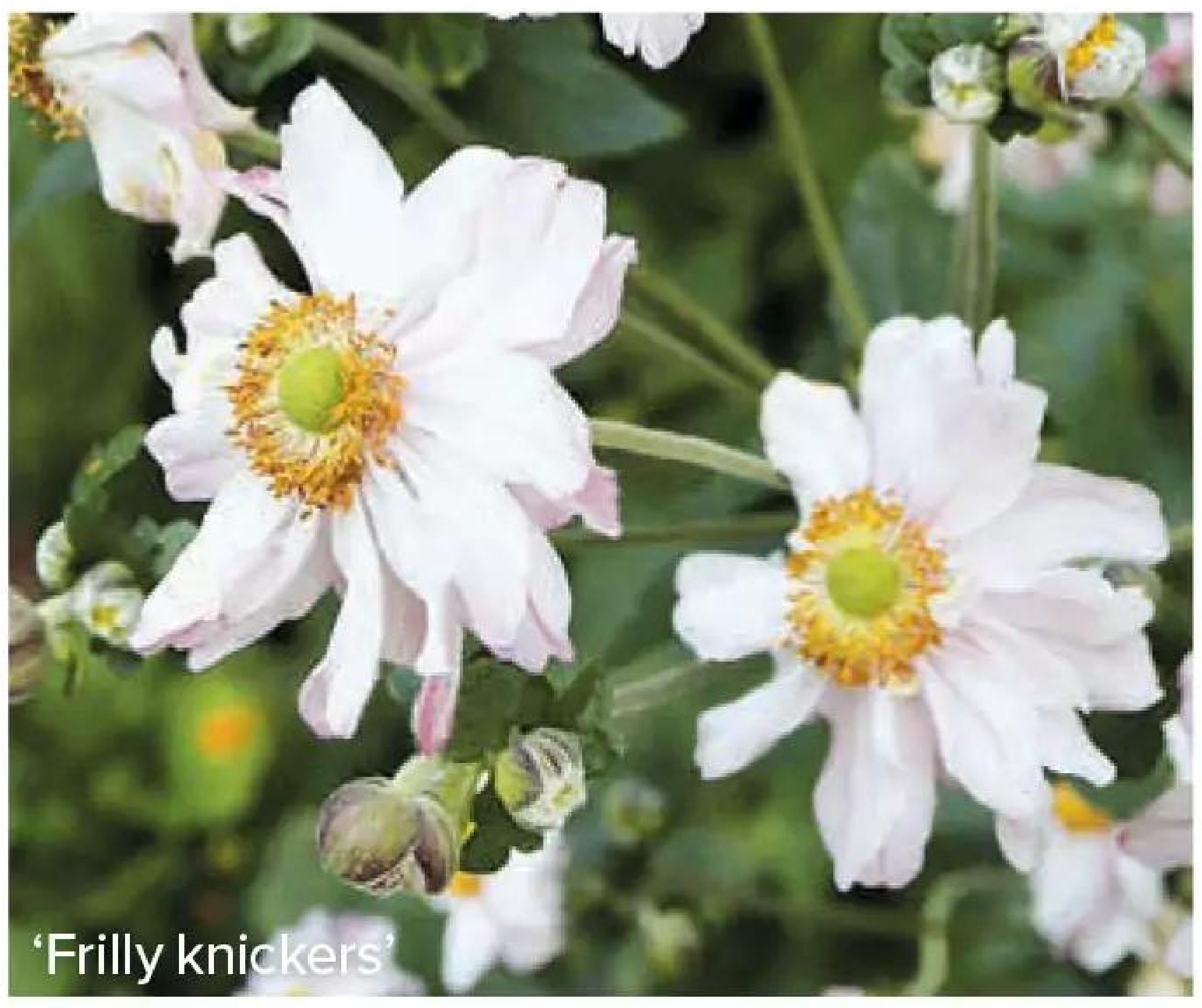
Japanese anemones will spread to fill larger areas. Despite their height, there is no need for pruning or staking

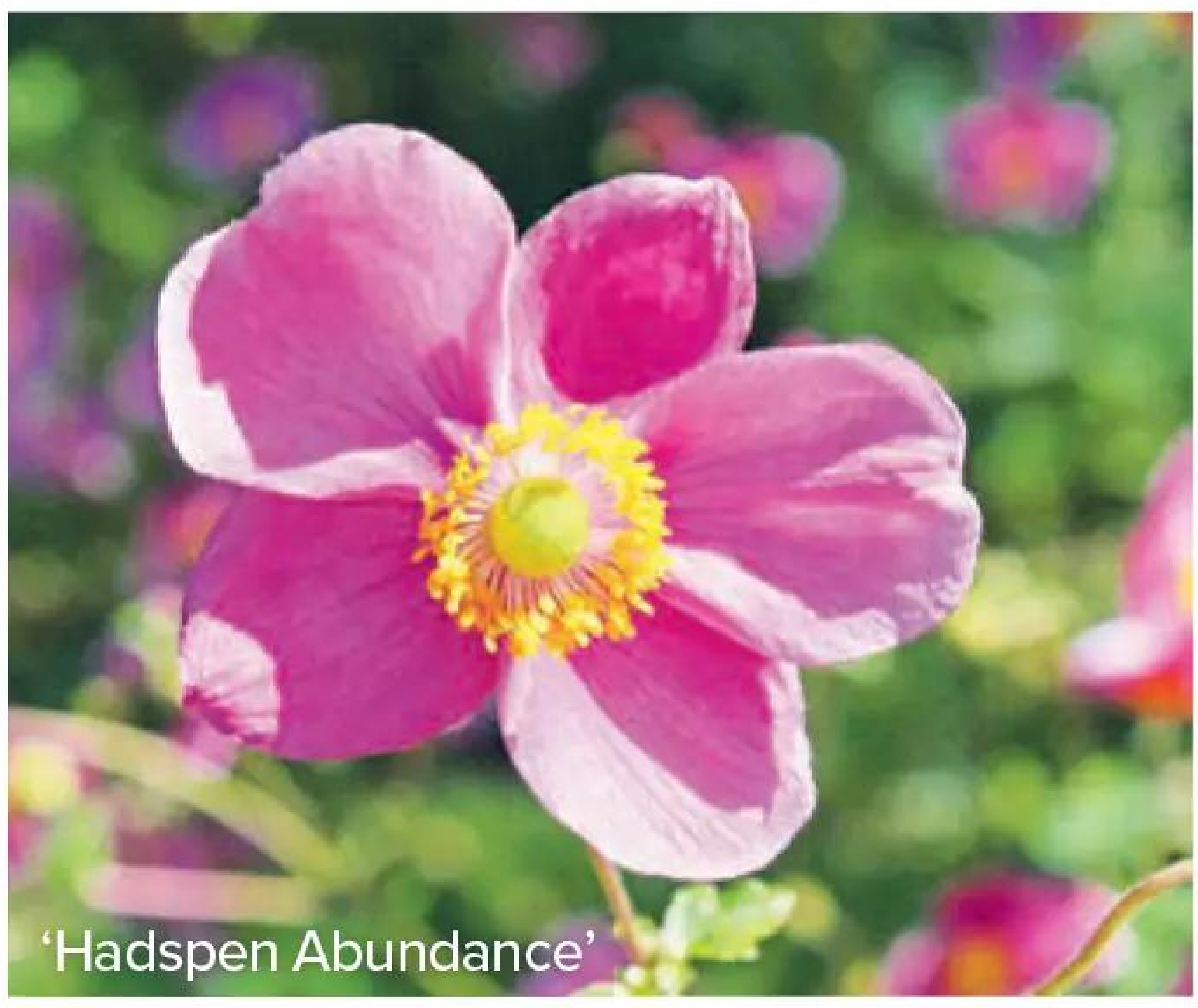
Did you know...

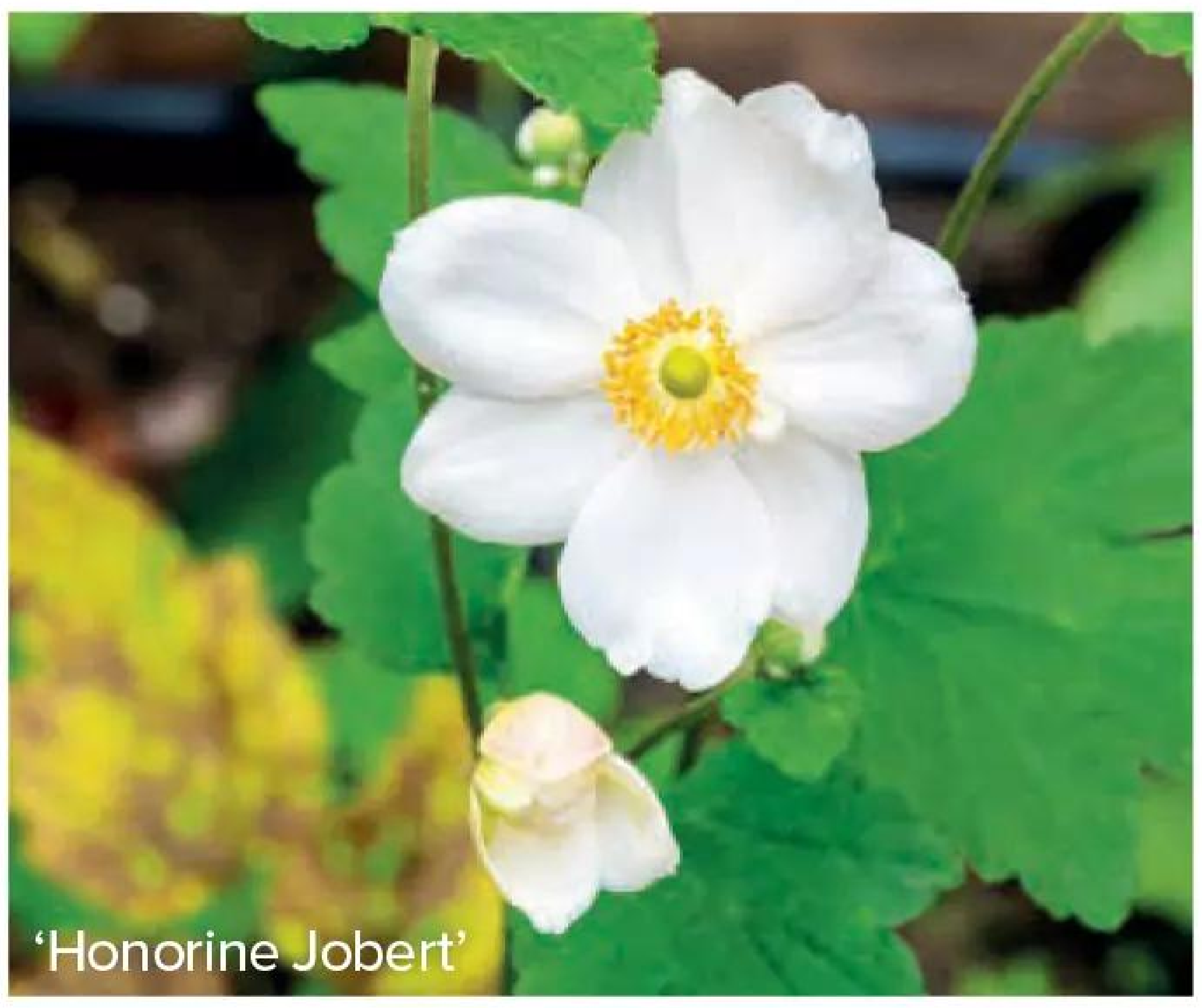
Japanese anemones are sometimes called 'windflowers' due to their airy habit and the way their delicate flowers move in the breeze

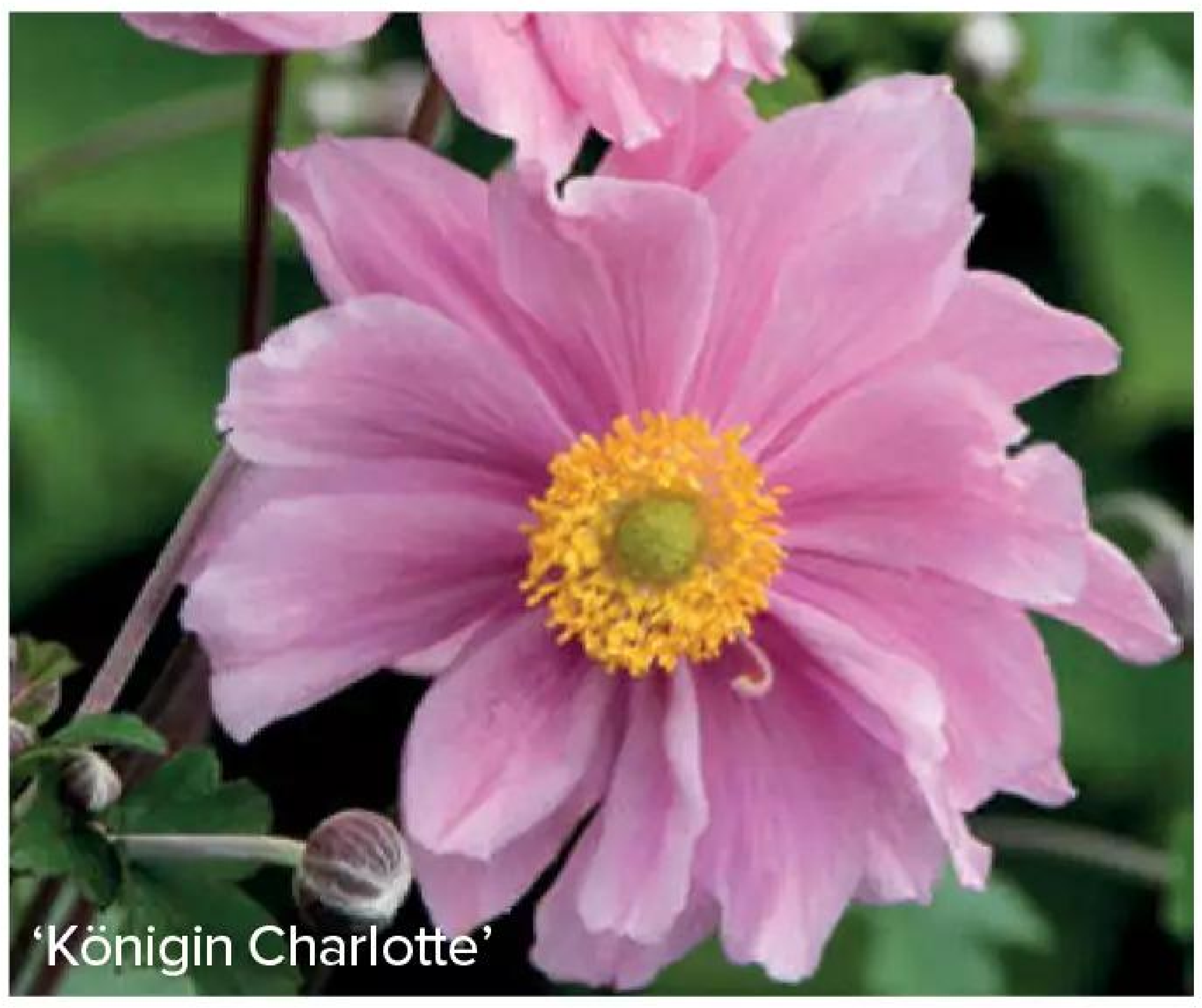

'Little Princess'

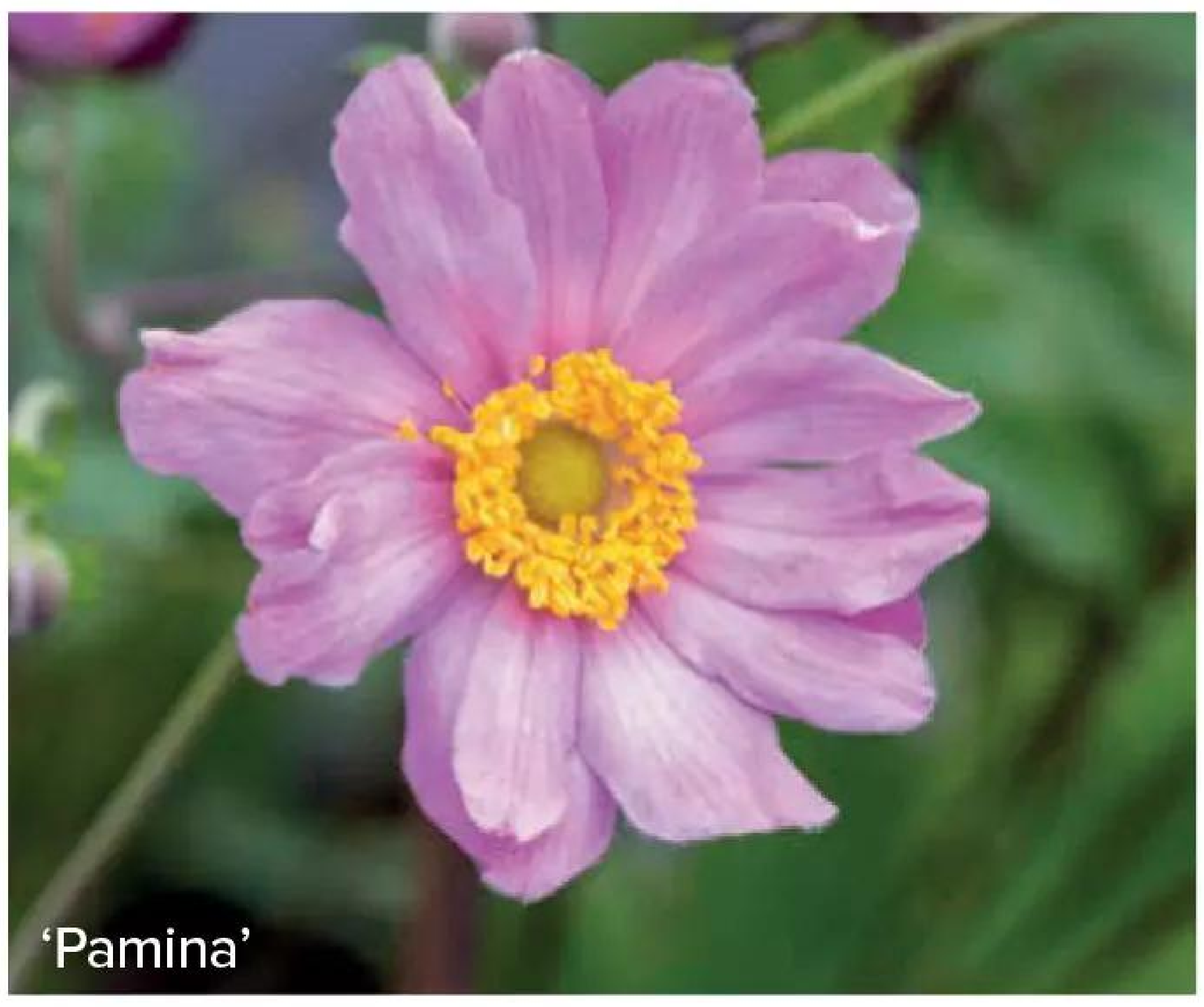

'Bressingham Glow'

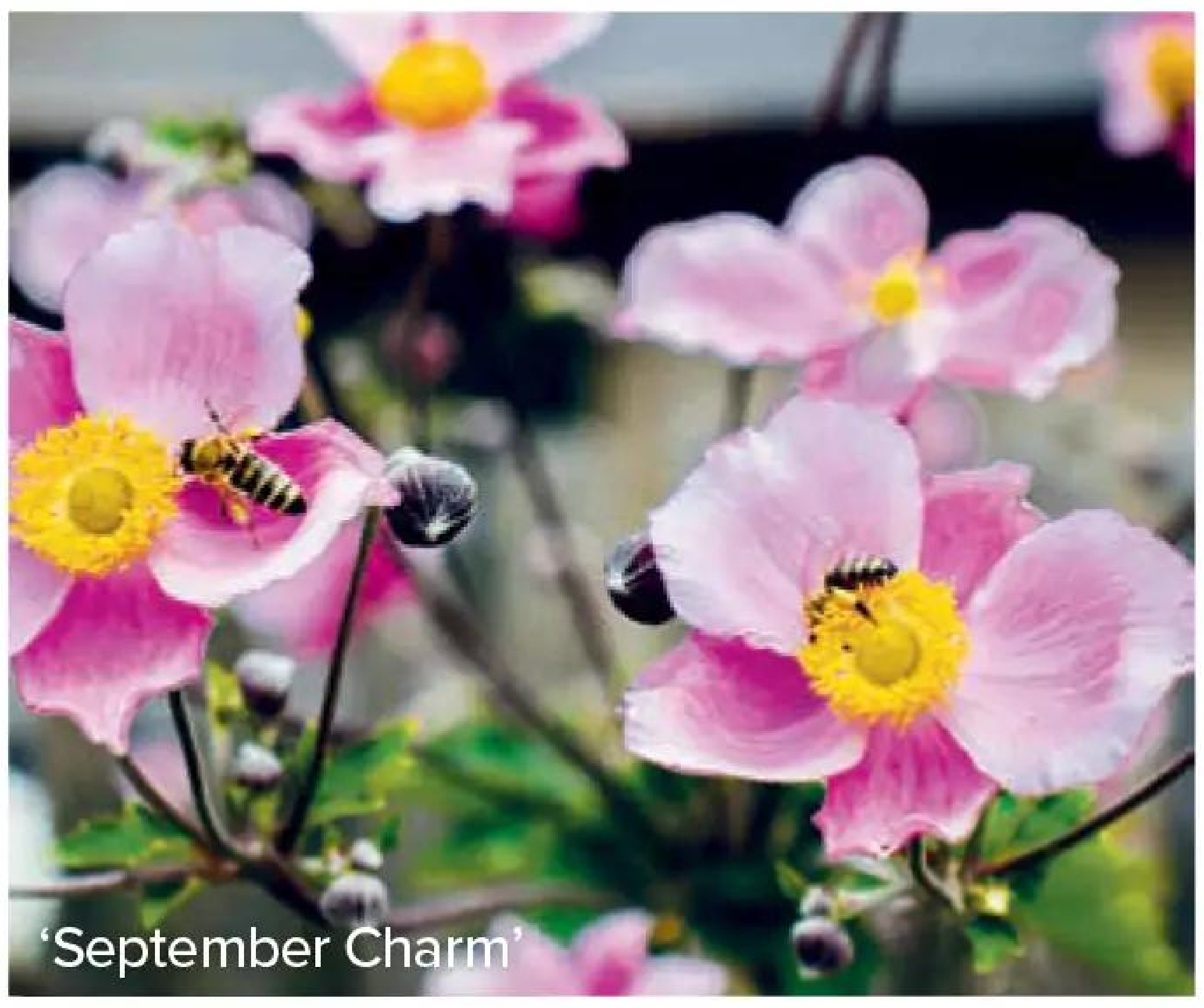

'Frilly knickers'

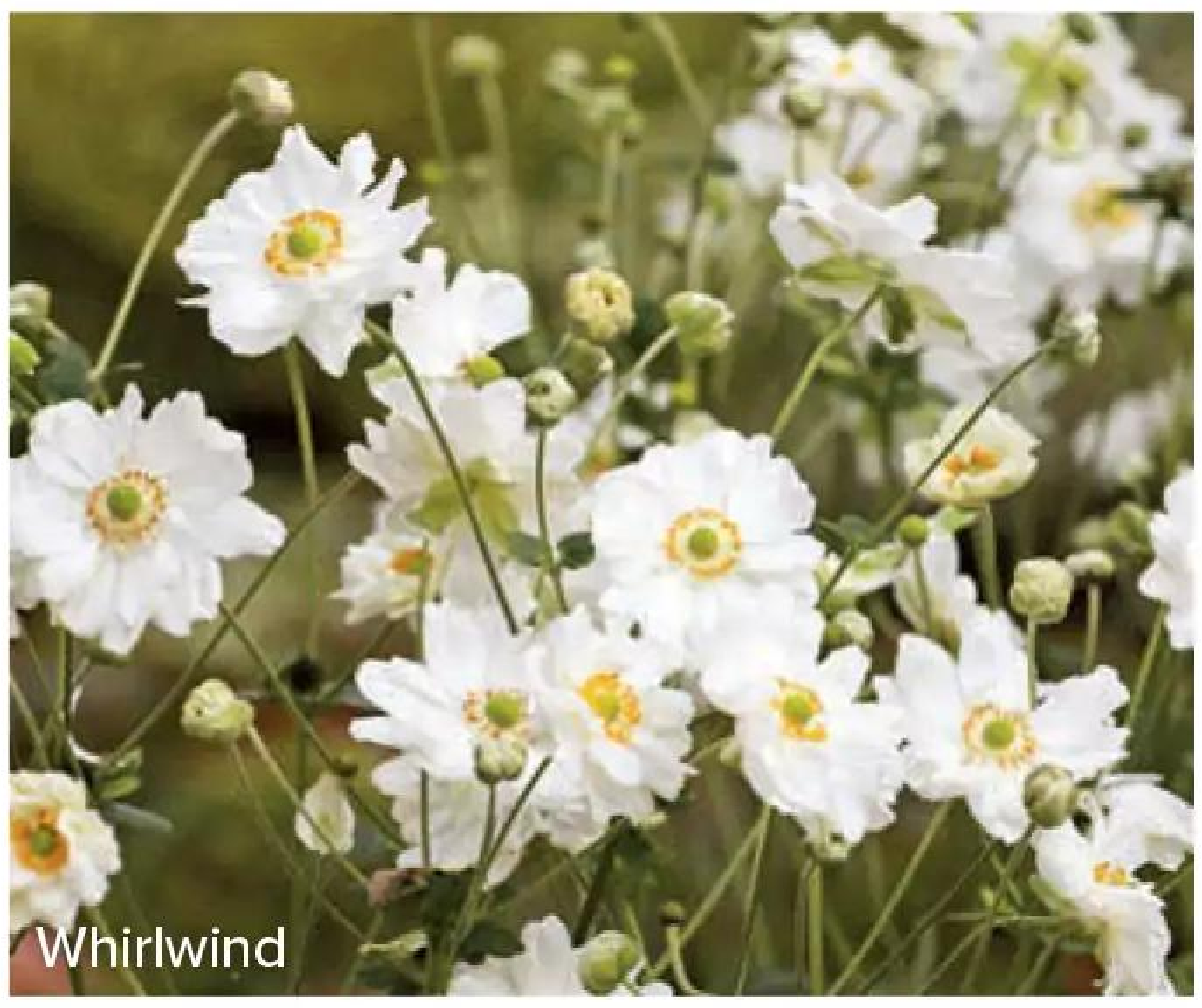

'Hadspen Abundance'


'Honorine Jobert'


'Königin Charlotte'


'Pamina'


'September Charm'


Whirlwind

SHUTTERSTOCK

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** Although at their best in part-shade, Japanese anemones will tolerate a sunny location – particularly the dark-pink varieties. If planting in sun, they suit a position where they get some respite from intense afternoon heat. The ideal soil conditions should mimic the free-draining dappled woodland areas they prefer.

✿ **Planting:** Plant in spring. Prepare the soil to ensure good drainage but retain some moisture. They won't tolerate heavy waterlogged soils but do appreciate some moisture.

✿ **Care:** These hardy perennials die back over winter, with new foliage emerging in spring. Cut foliage back in autumn and apply a mulch in spring. They need very little attention and don't require protection over winter.

Top tips

- Plant in large swathes for maximum impact
- Allow room to spread as they naturalise easily
- Apply a generous woodland bark mulch in spring

Pests & diseases

Japanese anemones are generally pest and disease free. In very dry periods they might be affected by powdery mildew, but this is usually not severe.

Spreading and control

Japanese anemones spread enthusiastically via stoloniferous roots. They can be hard to rein in or remove once established. If you want to move them or reduce the size of the clump, be sure to remove any remaining roots from the ground as they will regrow easily.

Rudbeckia

Asteraceae

Plant: spring

Position: full sun

Hardiness: -20°C

Propagate: seeds/division

Discover the charm of Rudbeckia, a versatile perennial that brings a golden glow to borders and prairies alike

Rudbeckia, commonly known as coneflower (not to be confused with Echinacea) or black-eyed Susan, is a stalwart of the late summer and autumn garden. With their daisy-like blooms in cheerful shades of yellow, orange, and rich mahogany, these robust plants offer a prolonged display of colour when many other perennials are beginning to fade.

Native to North America, Rudbeckia belongs to the *Asteraceae* family and includes both annual and perennial species. The most popular variety, *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm', has become a mainstay in gardens worldwide, prized for its reliability and long flowering period.

Rudbeckias typically form clumps of dark green, slightly hairy leaves, from which sturdy stems rise to heights ranging from 60cm to 2m, depending on the species. The flowers feature prominent central cones, usually dark brown or black, surrounded by ray florets in vibrant yellow or orange hues. This striking contrast not only catches the eye but also attracts a host of pollinators, including bees and butterflies, making Rudbeckia an excellent choice for wildlife-friendly gardens.

These hardy plants thrive in full sun and well-drained soil, though they can tolerate partial shade. Once established, they are remarkably

Top tips

- Plant in groups of three or five for maximum impact in borders
- Deadhead regularly to prolong flowering and prevent self-seeding
- Leave some stems standing over winter to provide food for birds and winter structure

drought-tolerant, making them suitable for prairie-style plantings and low-maintenance borders. Their upright form and strong stems mean they rarely need staking, even in exposed positions.

Rudbeckias pair beautifully with ornamental grasses, creating naturalistic planting schemes that evoke the North American prairie. They also combine well with other late-season perennials such as *Echinacea*, *Helenium*, and Asters, forming a tapestry of warm autumnal tones.

Whether used en masse in drifts, as feature plants in mixed borders, or even in large containers, Rudbeckias provide reliable colour and structure from midsummer well into autumn. Their seed heads, if left standing, offer winter interest and a valuable food source for birds, extending their garden value long after the flowers have faded.

GROWING RUDBECKIA

- **Hardiness:** Most species hardy to -20°C
- **Height and spread:** Varies by species, typically 60cm-2m tall, 45cm-60cm spread
- **Soil:** Well-drained, fertile soil
- **Aspect:** Full sun to partial shade
- **Flowering period:** July to October

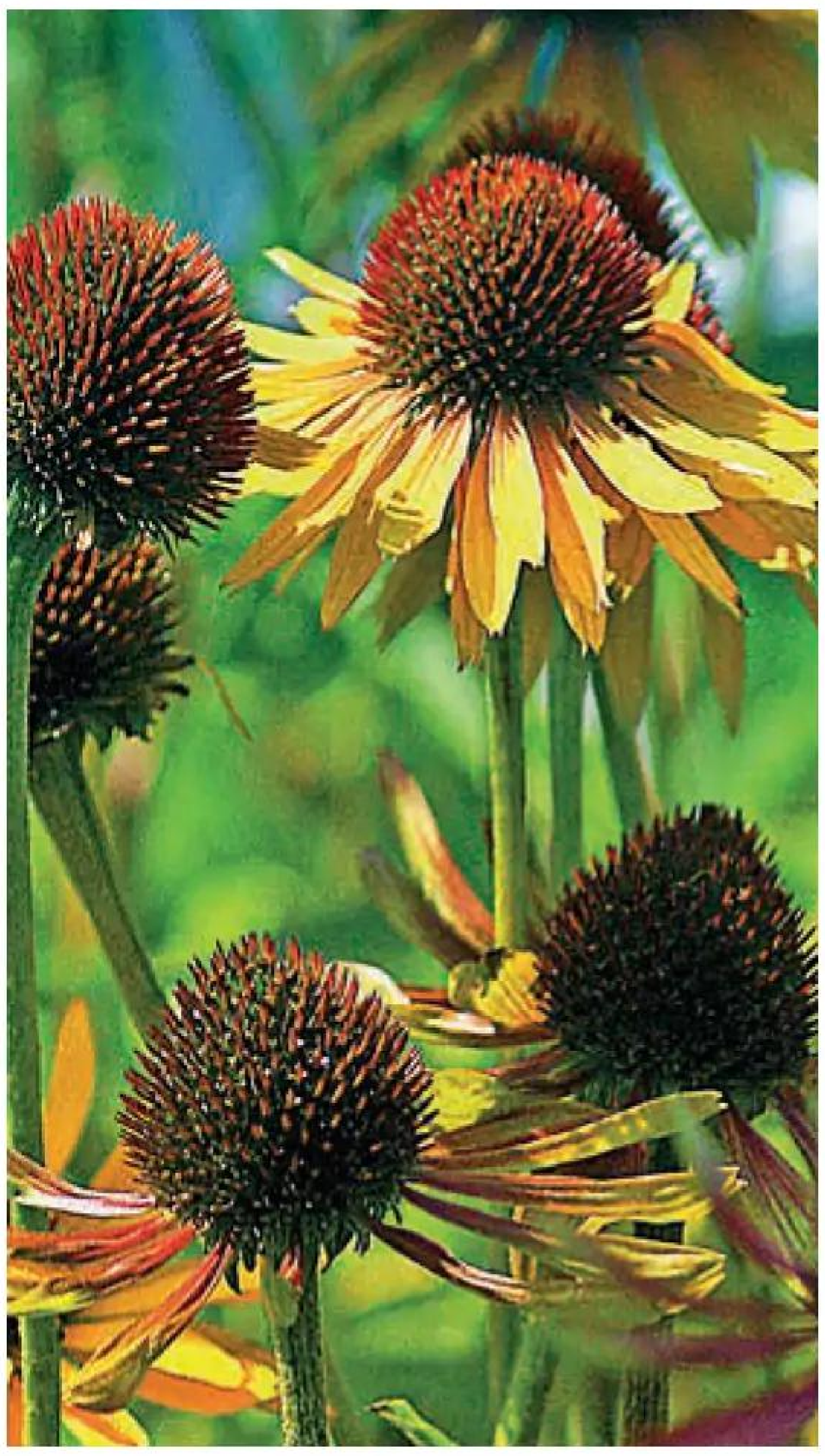
Popular varieties:

***R. fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm':** Classic yellow flowers, reliable perennial

***R. hirta* 'Cherry Brandy':** Rich red annual with dark centres

***R.* 'Prairie Sun':** Large flowers with green centres and yellow-tipped petals

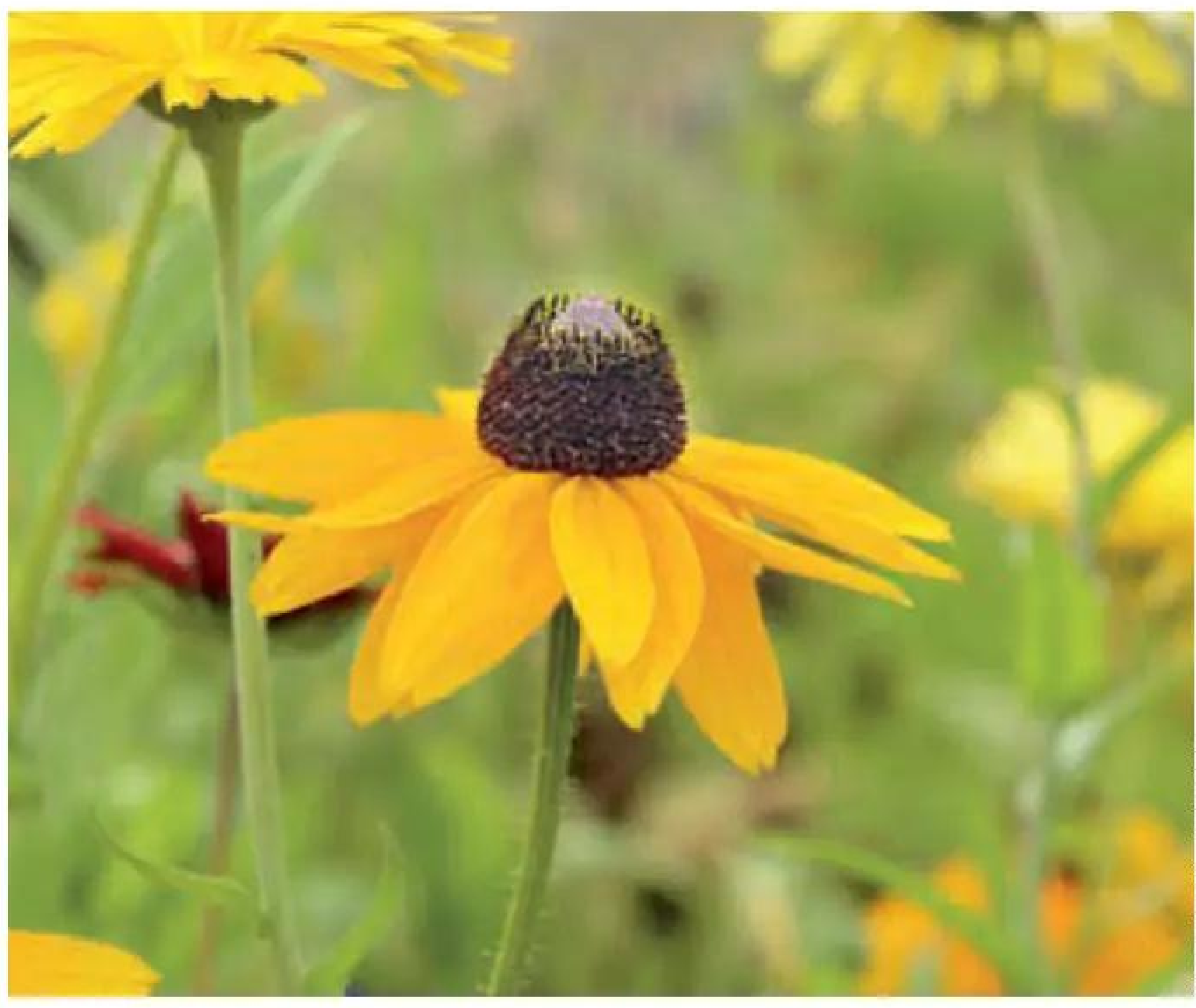
***R. laciniata* 'Herbstsonne':** Tall variety reaching up to 2m with lemon-yellow flowers



Did you know...

Rudbeckia gets its common name 'black-eyed Susan' from its dark central cone. The genus was named after Swedish botanists Olof Rudbeck the Elder and Younger

6 HALF-HARDY ANNUALS



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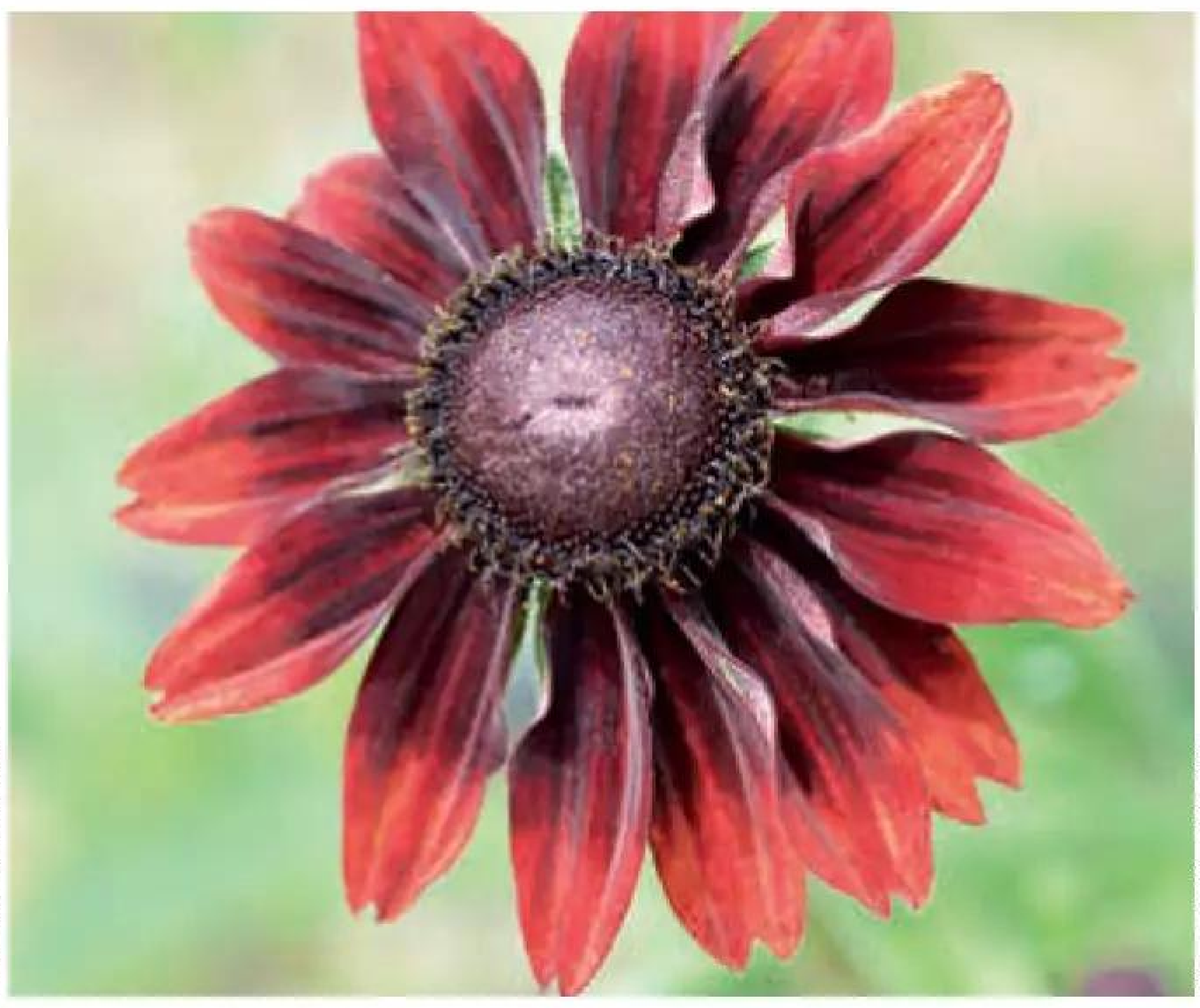

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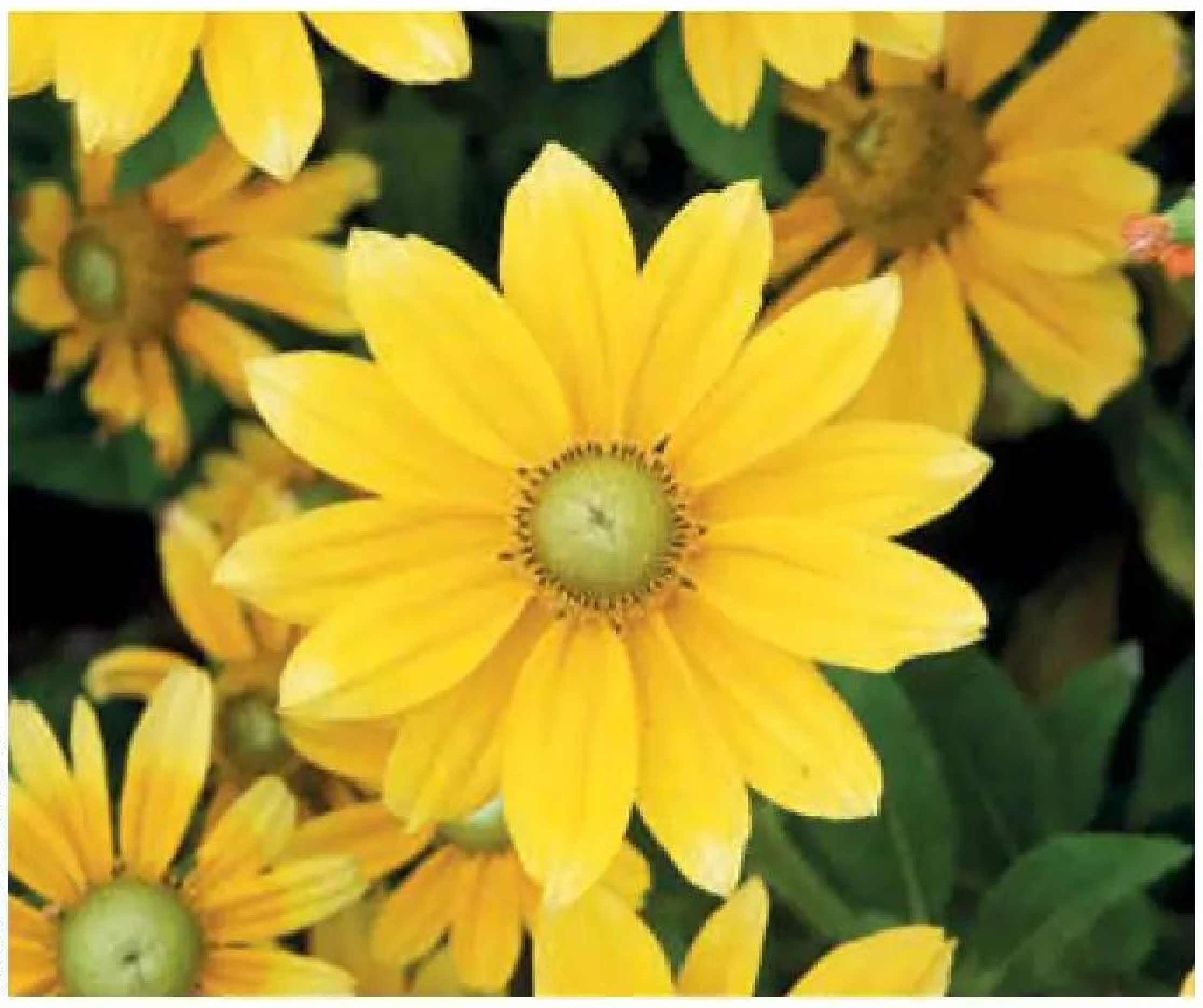
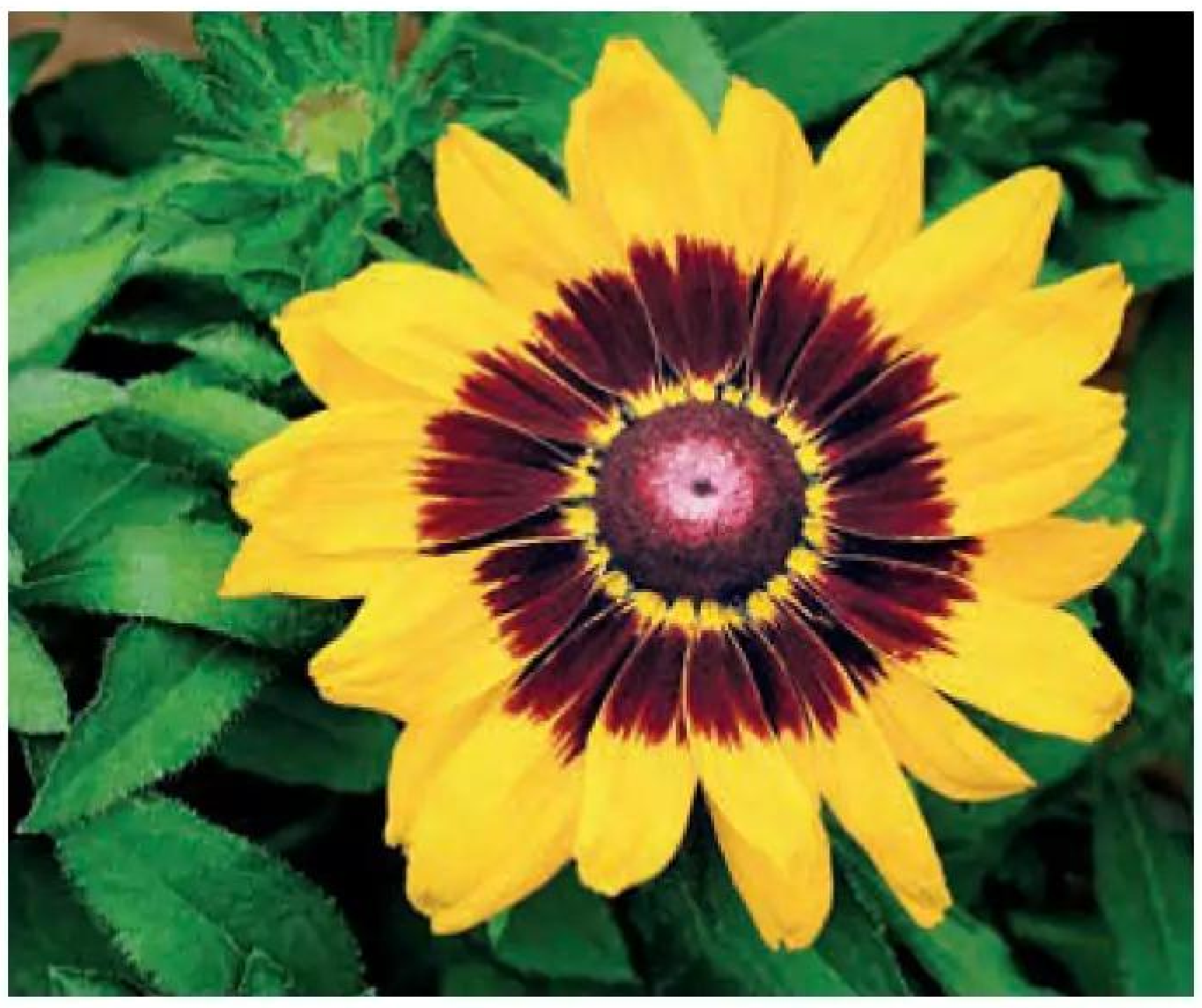
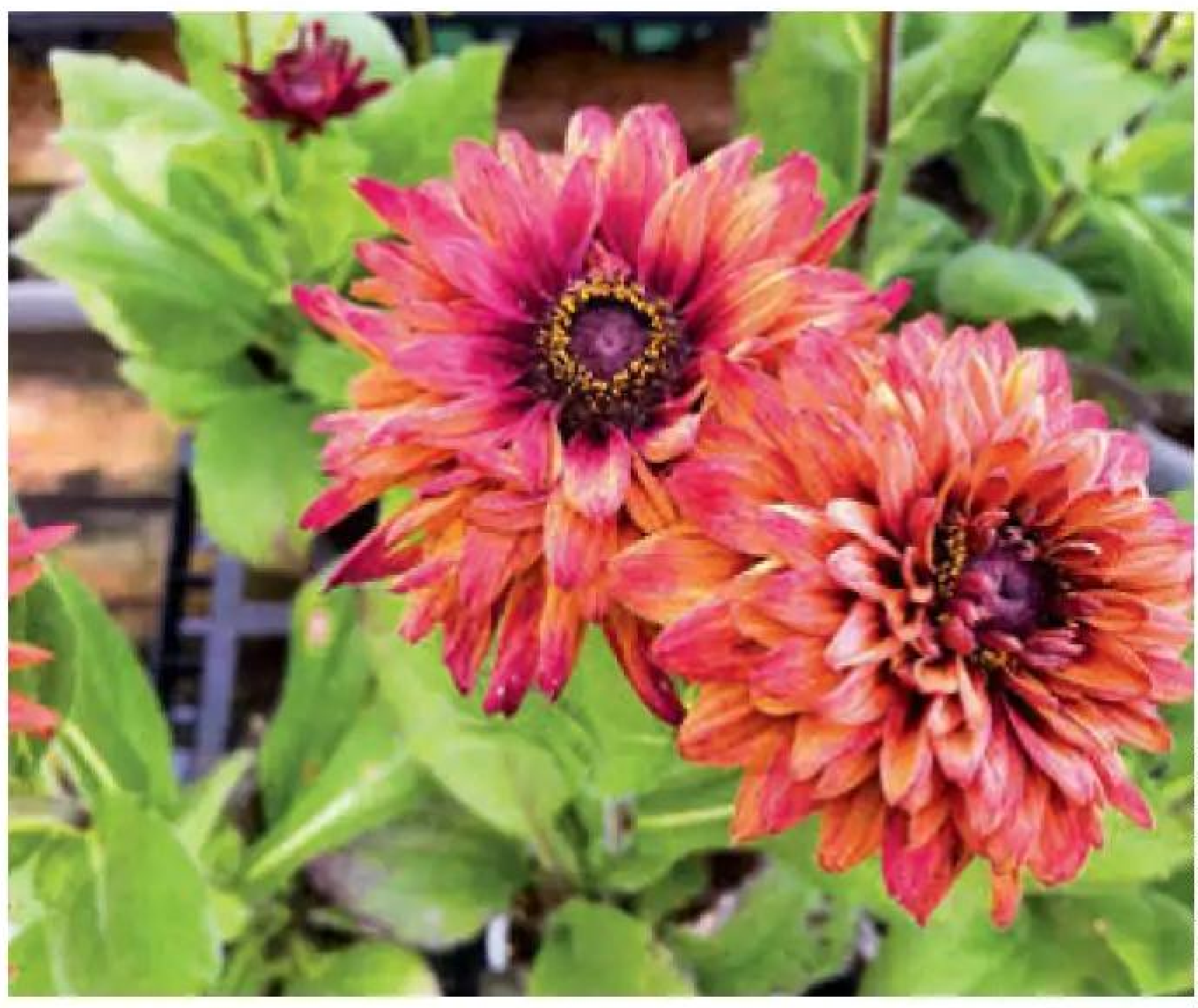


'Marmalade'
This long-established favourite has semi-double, golden orange rays around a dark eye. Takes bad weather well. **Type:** *Rudbeckia hirta*, half-hardy annual. **Good for:** Containers, annual and mixed borders, and cutting. **Also try:** Big SmileyZ Sun is more prolific, but hard to find. **HxS:** 18x16in (45x40cm).

'Cherry Brandy'
Wavy-edged, two-tone, cherry-red petals surround a black central cone on upright, usually self-supporting plants. **Type:** *Rudbeckia hirta*, half-hardy annual. **Good for:** Containers, annual and mixed borders, cutting. **Also try:** 'Chocolate Orange', with orange-tipped, chocolate-mahogany flowers. **HxS:** 24x16in (60x40cm).

'Prairie Sun'
Large green-eyed single flowers are golden-yellow, with paler tips to each ray. Very similar to 'Irish Eyes'. **Type:** *Rudbeckia hirta*, half-hardy annual. **Good for:** Annual and mixed borders, cutting. **Also try:** 'Sunbeckia Ophelia' AGM, which is more prolific, but can be hard to find. **HxS:** 32x24in (80x60cm).





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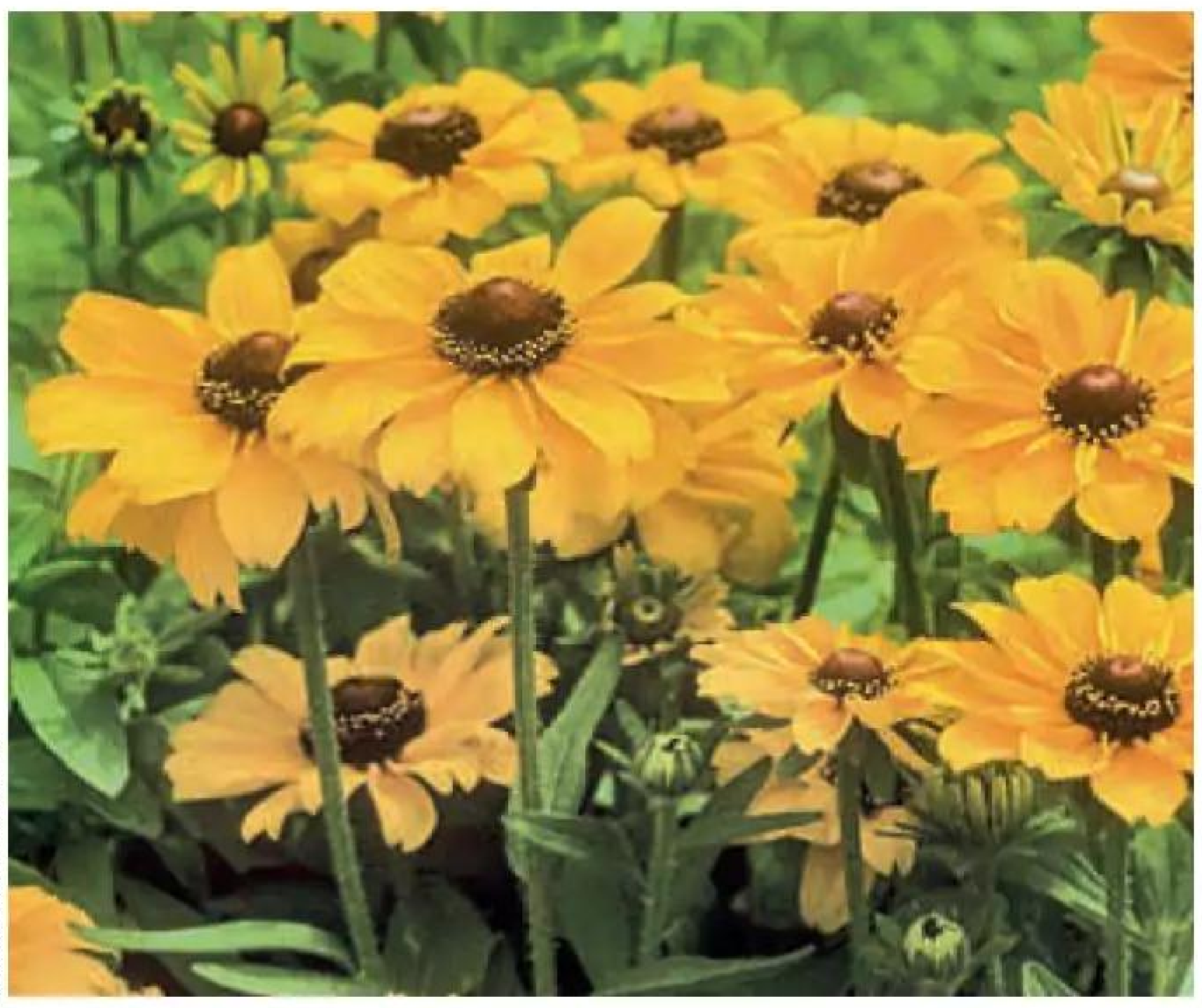


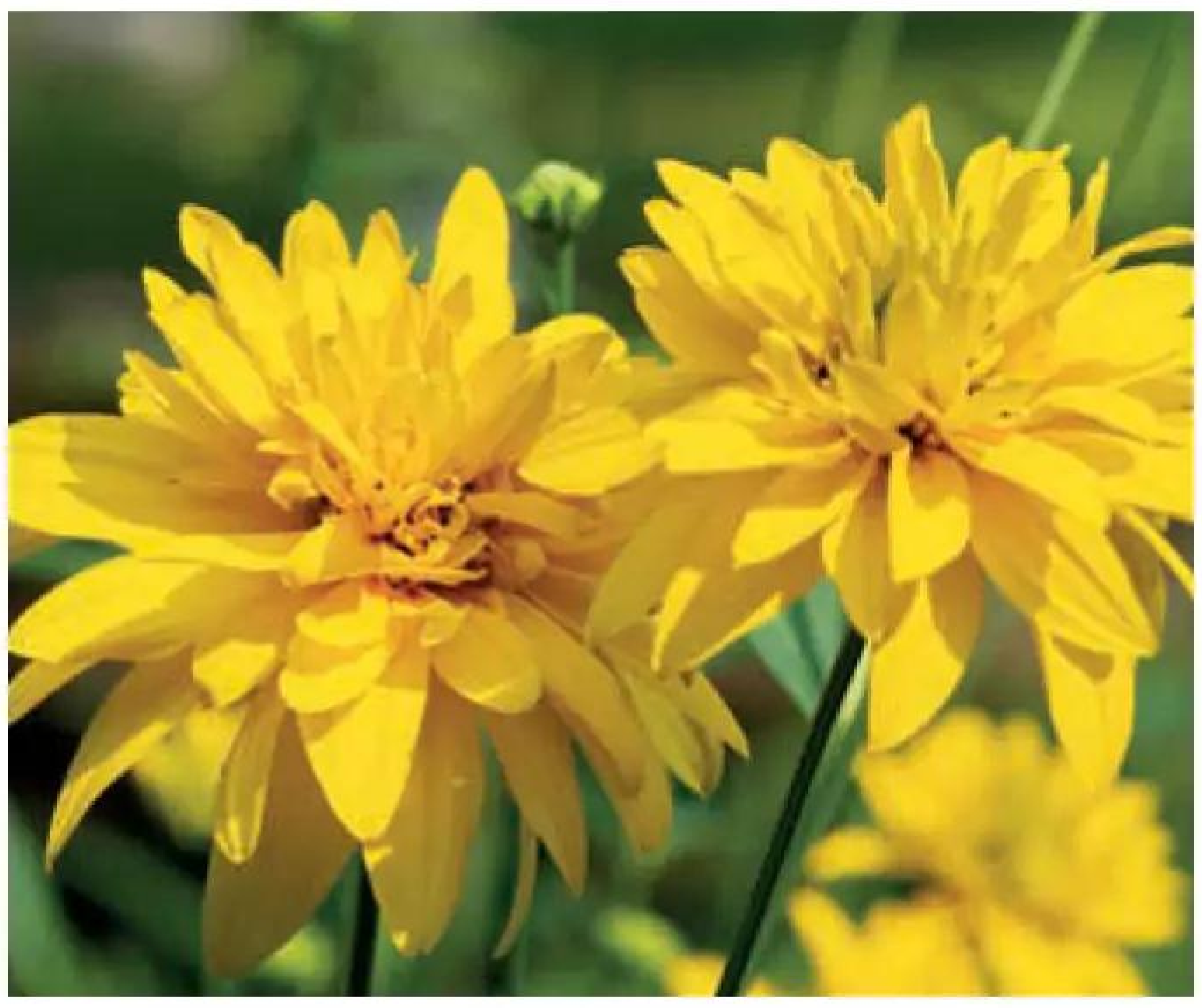
Sunbeckia Series AGM
Stunning, extra vigorous, very large-flowered varieties in seven single, semi-double and double colours. Breathtaking. **Type:** *Rudbeckia hirta*, half-hardy perennial. **Good for:** Large containers. **Also try:** The slightly taller Big SmileyZ Series AGM. **H&S:** 16-20in (40-50cm).

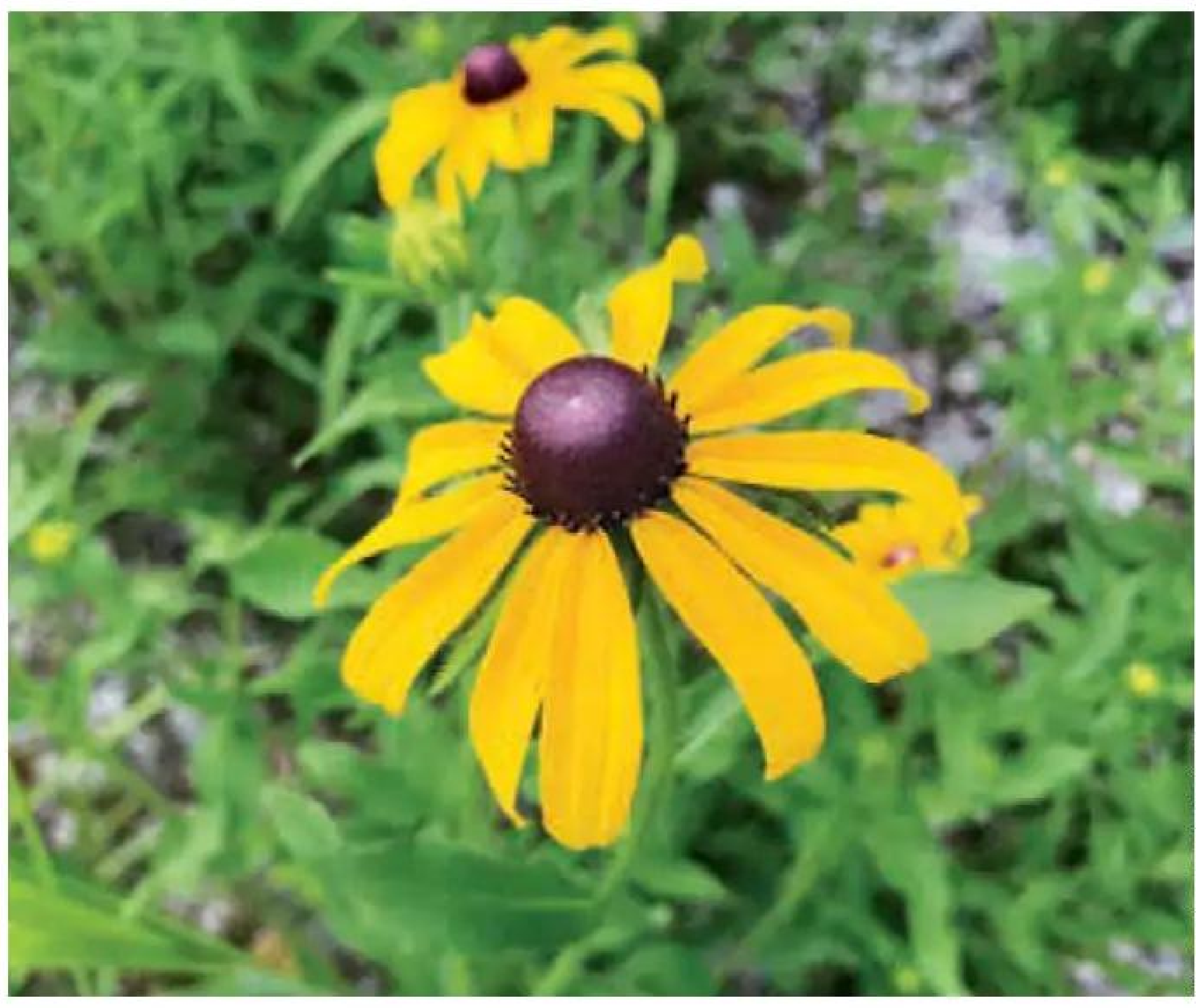
'Sahara'
Semi-double and double flowers in shades of caramel, gold, peachy and coppery red, amber and more. **Type:** *Rudbeckia hirta*, half-hardy annual. **Good for:** Annual and mixed borders, cutting. **Also try:** Enchanted Series, separate colours available. **H&S:** 20-24in (50-60cm).

'Toto'
Short and prolific, with single flowers in gold, lemon and a red-and-yellow bicolour. The shortest rudbeckias of all. **Type:** *Rudbeckia hirta*, half-hardy annual. **Good for:** Edging, small containers. **Also try:** Nothing else is as compact as this variety. **H&S:** 8-10in (20-25cm).

Did you know… *Rudbeckia hirta* is the state flower of Maryland, USA. Native Americans used various Rudbeckia species medicinally to treat colds, flu, and infections, as well as to make a wash for sores and snakebites

3 HARDY PERENNIALS





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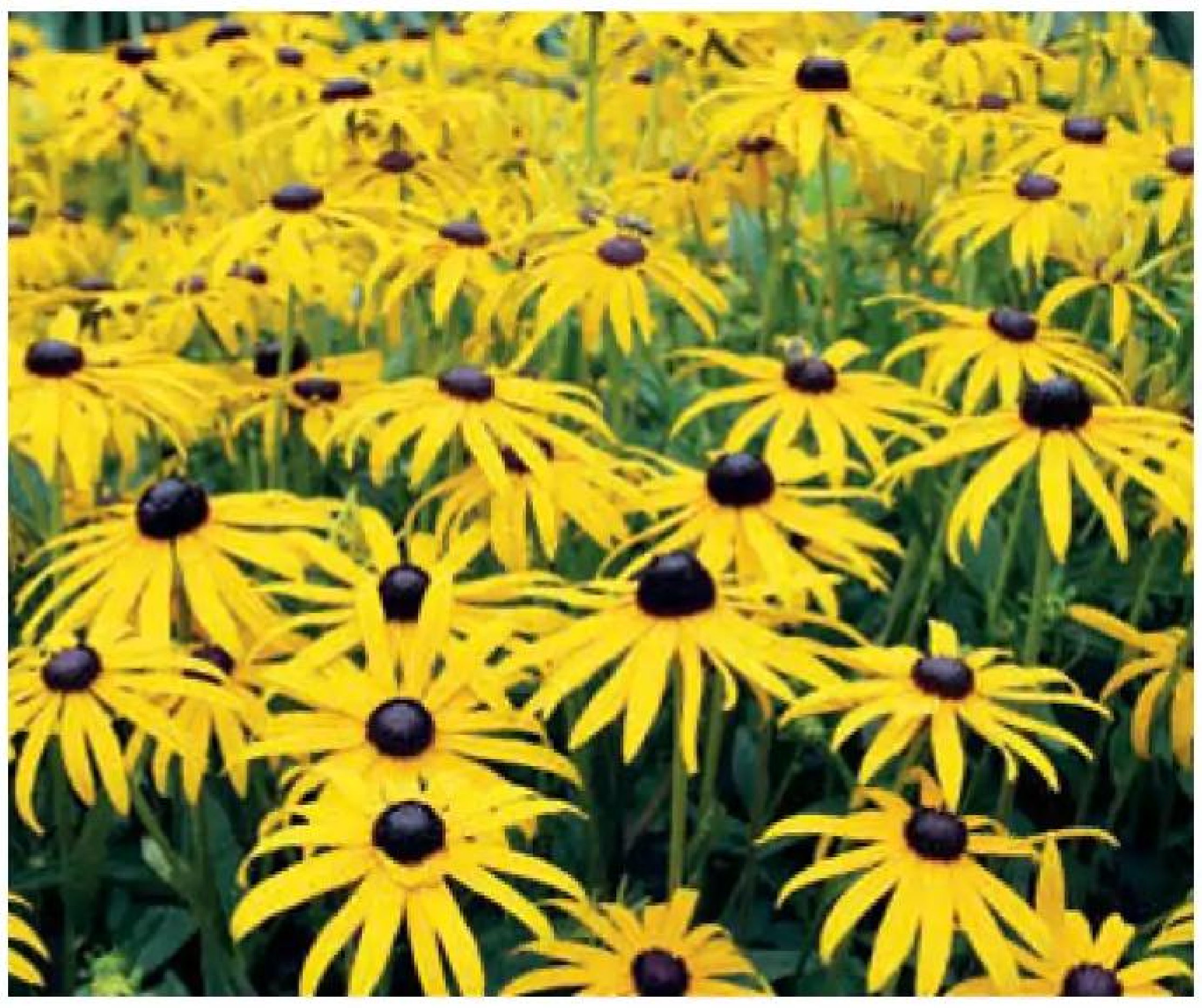
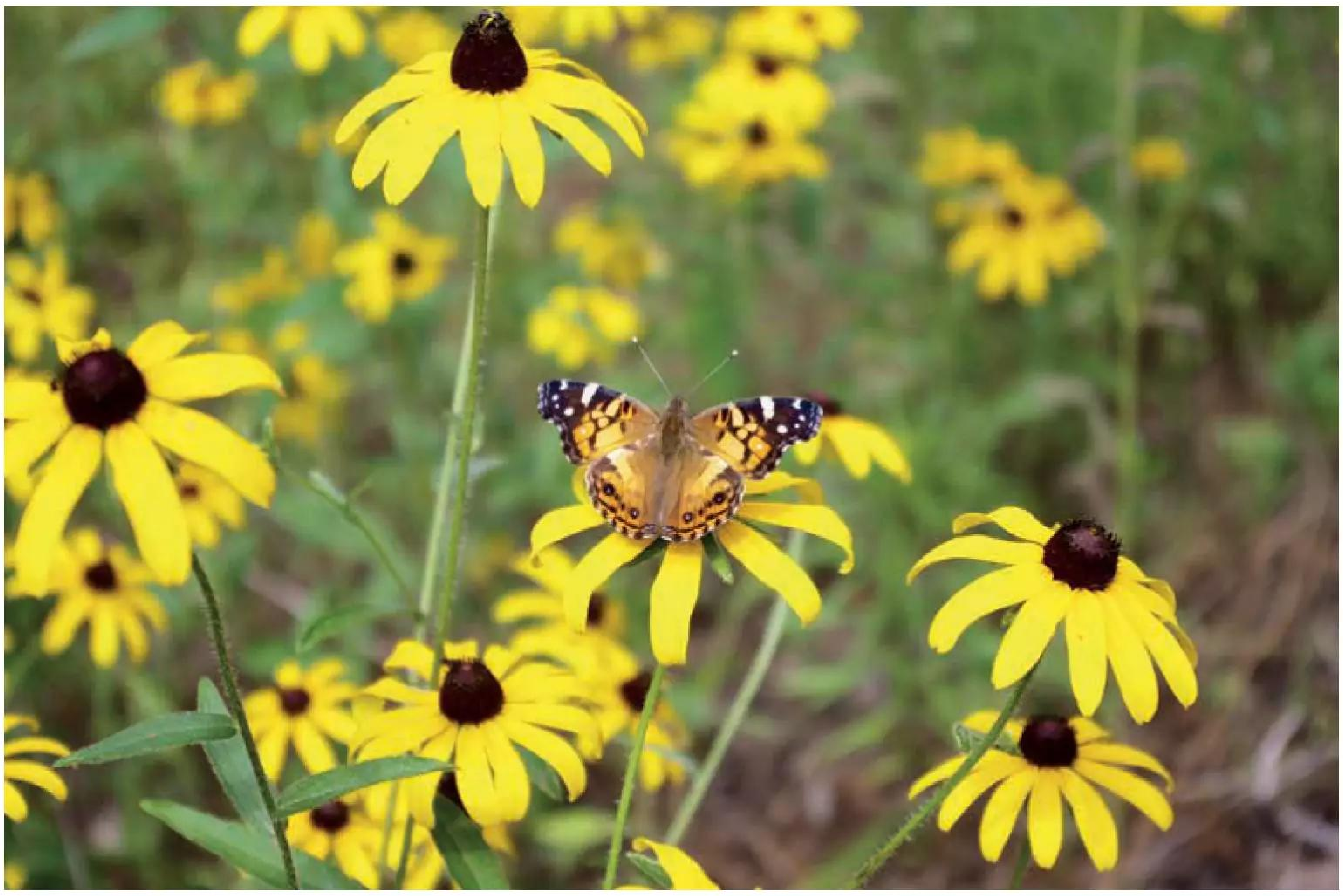


'Goldquelle' AGM
Large, dark-eyed, double yellow flowers on prolific plants from July through to September. **Type:** *Rudbeckia laciniata*, hardy perennial. **Good for:** Perennial and mixed borders, cutting. **Also try:** 'Hortensia' which is taller at 5-6ft (1.5-1.8m). **HxS:** 3ft 3in-4ftx3ft-3ft 3in (1-1.2mx90cm-1m).

'American Gold Rush'
Late-flowering, August to October, with dark-eyed golden flowers. Specially developed for disease resistance. **Type:** *Rudbeckia fulgida*, hardy perennial. **Good for:** Mixed and perennial borders, cutting. **Also try:** 'Goldsturm',a little taller, but not disease resistant. **HxS:** 26x39in (65cmx1m).

'Goldsturm' AGM
Dark-eyed, deep-yellow, single flowers from July to October, one of the most reliable of all hardy perennials. **Type:** *Rudbeckia fulgida*, hardy perennial. **Good for:** Perennial and mixed borders, cutting. **Also try:** The dwarf 'Little Goldstar' (H&S: 12-14in/30-35cm). **HxS:** 28-35x20-28in (70-90x50-70cm).



PLANTING AND PROPAGATION

Rudbeckias are best planted in spring or early autumn. Choose a sunny spot with well-drained soil, and incorporate plenty of organic matter before planting. Space plants about 45cm apart, allowing room for growth.

To propagate perennial Rudbeckias, divide established clumps every 3-4 years in spring. This not only creates new plants but also reinvigorates older specimens. Lift the entire clump, then carefully separate it into smaller sections, each with roots and shoots. Replant immediately and water well.

Annual Rudbeckias, such as *R. hirta*, can be grown from seed. Sow indoors in early spring, about 6-8 weeks before the last frost date. Provide warmth (around 70°F/21°C) for germination, which typically occurs within 10-14 days. Once seedlings are large enough to handle, transplant them into individual pots. Harden off before planting out after all risk of frost has passed.

Some perennial Rudbeckias, like *R. fulgida*, may self-seed if flower heads are left on the plant. These volunteers can be carefully dug up and transplanted in spring.

For a continuous display, consider succession planting of annual varieties every few weeks throughout the spring and early summer.

Pruning/care/other info

Cut back flowering stems of perennial Rudbeckias after blooming has finished. In spring, remove any remaining dead foliage. Mulch annually with well-rotted compost or manure. Water deeply during dry spells, especially when plants are establishing. Rudbeckias are generally pest-resistant but can occasionally suffer from powdery mildew in humid conditions.

4 companion plants

Late-flowering perennials such as Helenium...

... and Echinacea

Asters for complementary colours and textures

Ornamental grasses like *Stipa* and *Miscanthus*

How to... To create naturalistic, prairie-style planting

Combine Rudbeckias with ornamental grasses and other native North American perennials. Plant in drifts rather than formal arrangements, allowing plants to mingle. This low-maintenance approach not only looks stunning but also provides excellent habitat for wildlife, particularly beneficial insects and birds

Flag lily

Hesperantha coccinea

Plant: spring

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: -5°C to -10°C

Propagate: division

These exotic-looking flowers are elegant and colourful, and surprisingly easy to grow

Why not grow the crimson flag lily for long-lasting flowers in pinks, white and red? It's just the thing to add interest in the autumn months. With their starry, lily-like blooms, *Hesperantha* plants (formerly known as *Schizostylis*) bring a burst of colour to the garden when many other plants are fading.

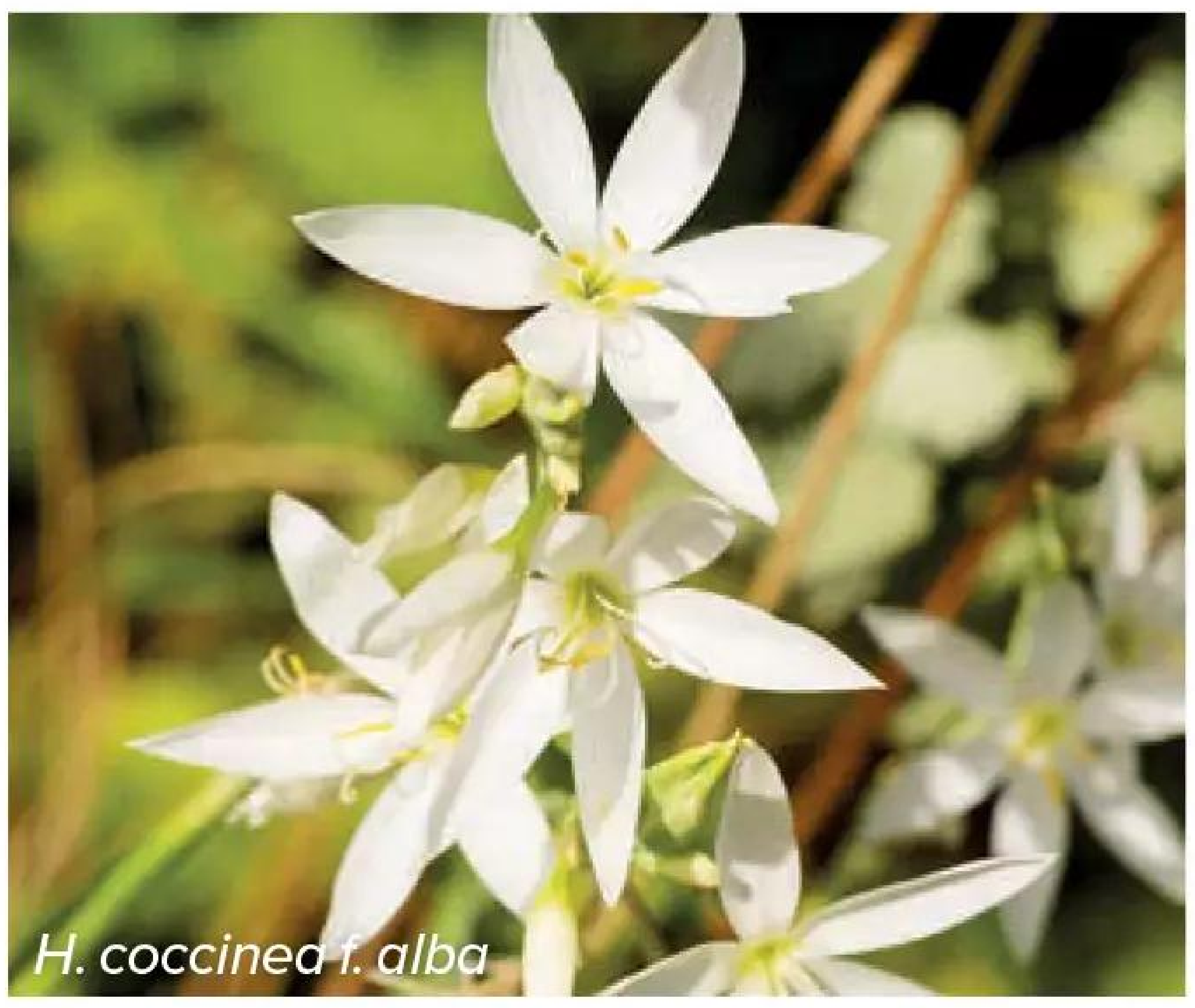
Native to South Africa's Drakensberg Mountains, these members of the iris family (*Iridaceae*) form clumps of strappy green leaves in summer, followed by flowers from late August into early September. Each slender flower spike can produce up to 12 flowers, adding vertical interest to borders. The blooms come in a varied range of pinks, plus an elegant white variety and the vivid-red flowers of the exotic 'Major'. In mild weather, they can continue flowering until December.

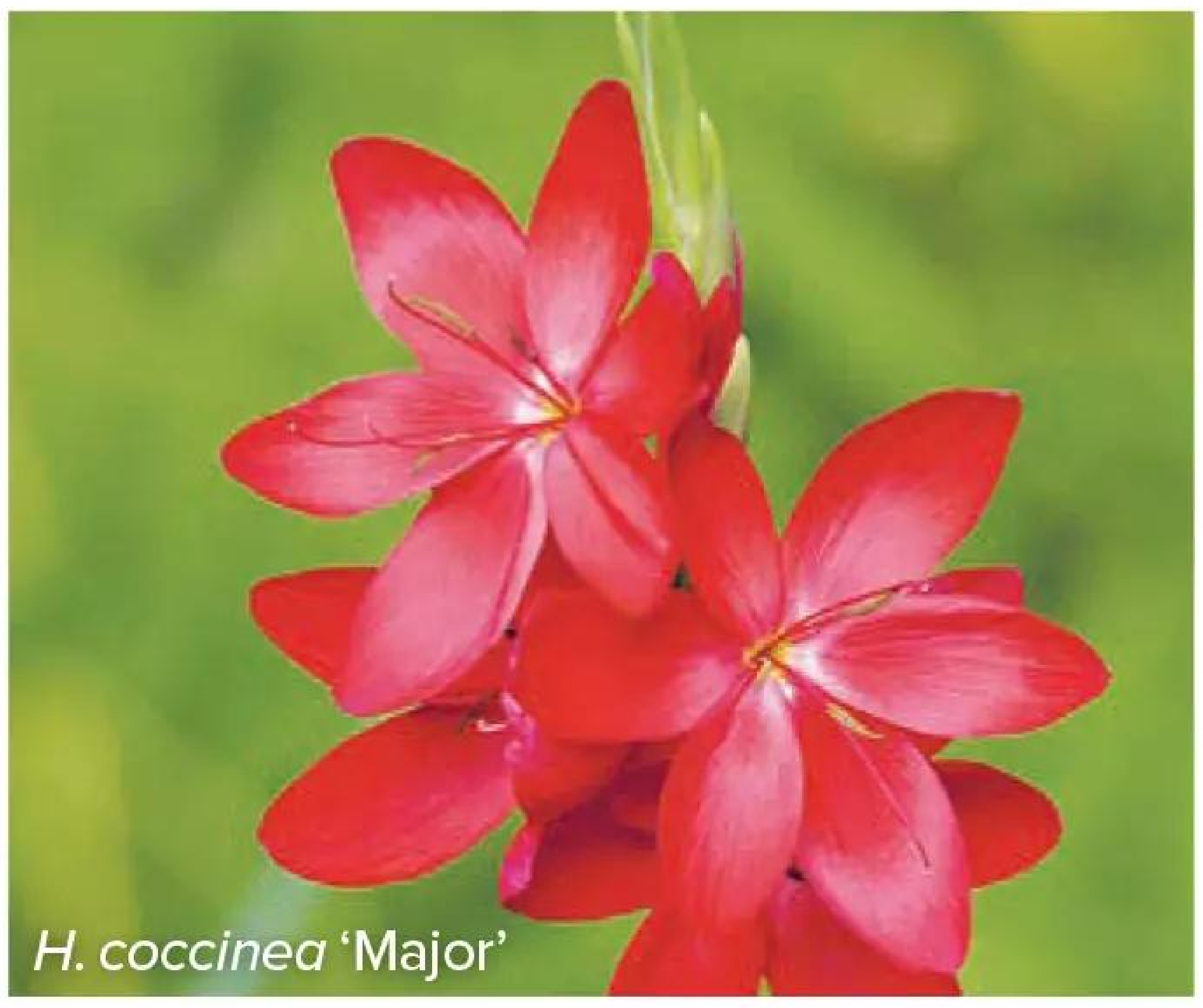
Hesperantha thrives in full sun or partial shade, preferring moisture-retentive but well-drained soil. For best results, plant in spring or purchase ready-potted plants in autumn. Add compost to the soil when planting, and mix in some grit for better drainage in clay soils. These plants are hardy to temperatures between -5°C and -10°C, but winter wet can be problematic. To protect against excess moisture, create a dry mulch of chipped bark over the plant in winter.

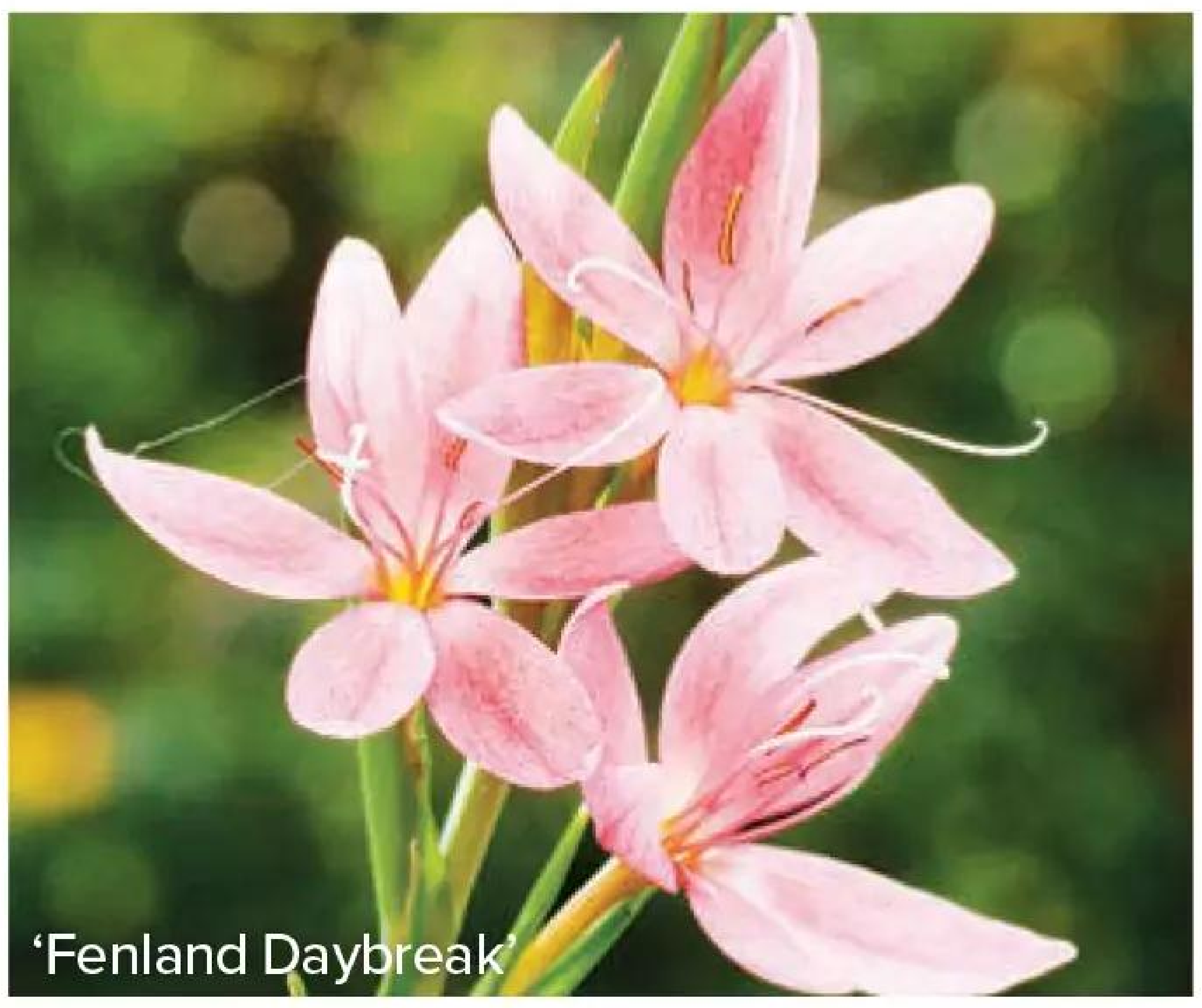
Divide clumps every three to four

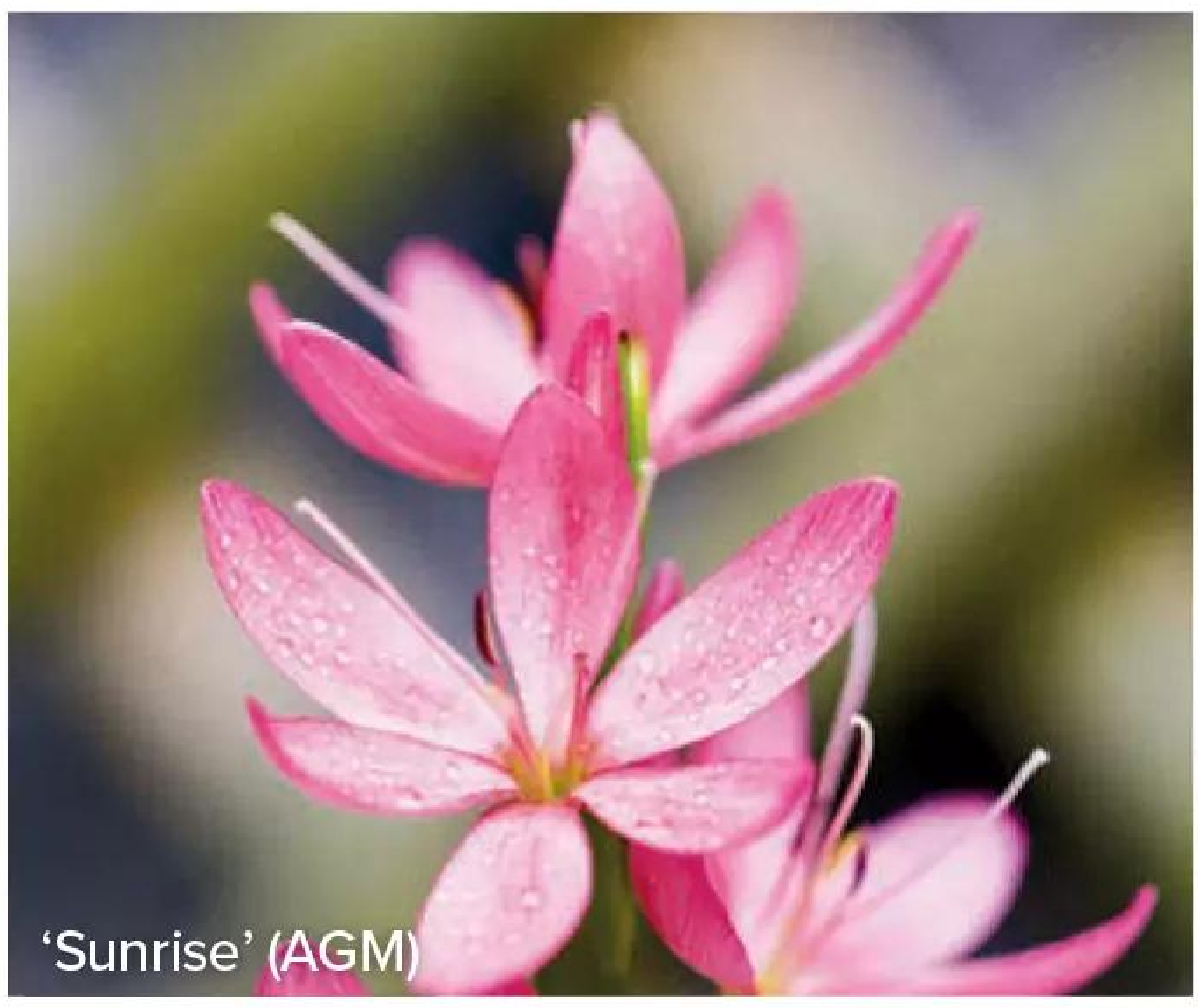
Top tips

- Plant in groups of three or four for best impact and divide clumps every three-four years to maintain flowering
- Ensure soil is moisture-retentive but well-drained. Mulch in spring with compost or grit to retain moisture


H. coccinea f. *alba*


H. coccinea 'Major'


'Fenland Daybreak'


'Sunrise' (AGM)

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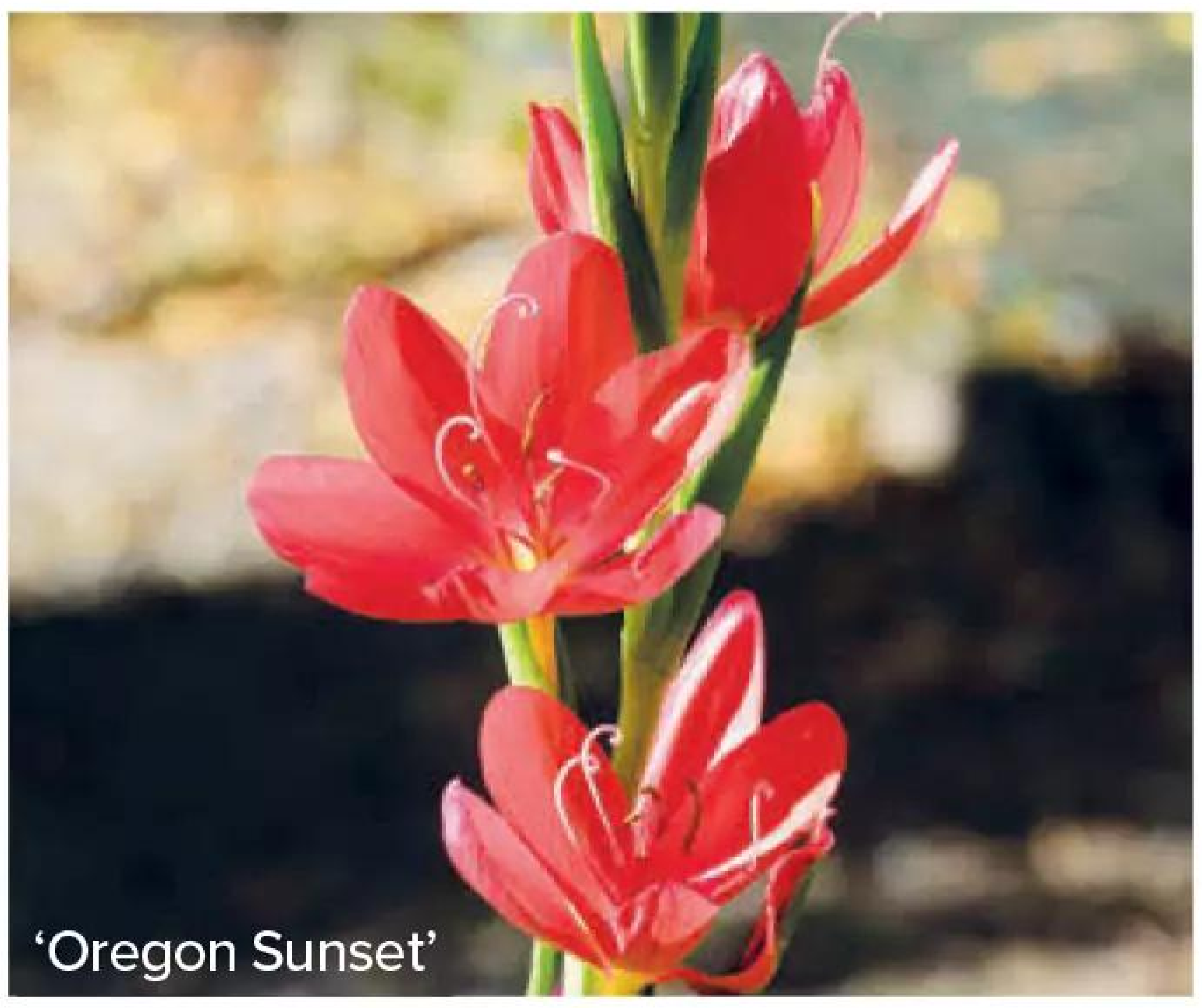
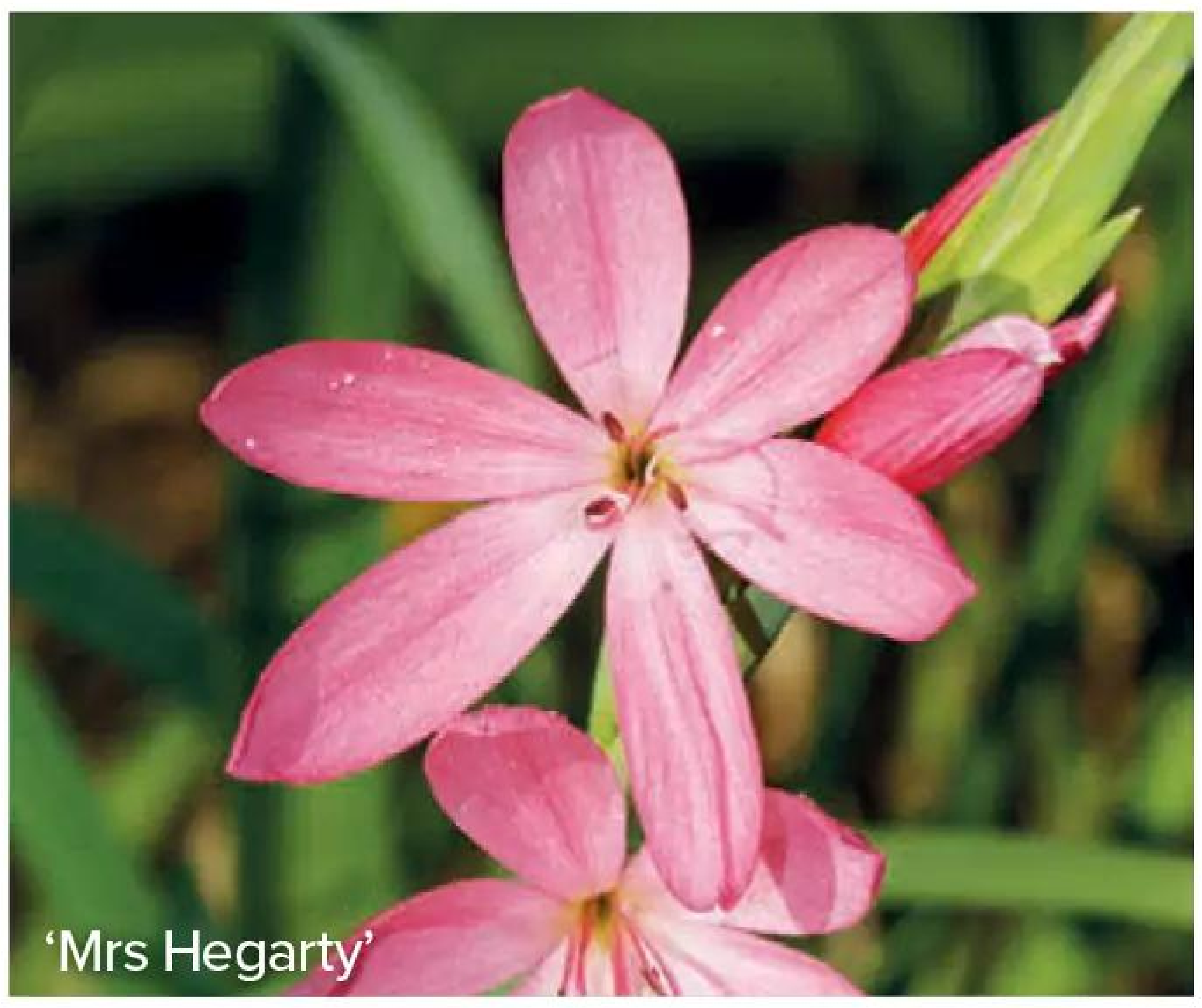
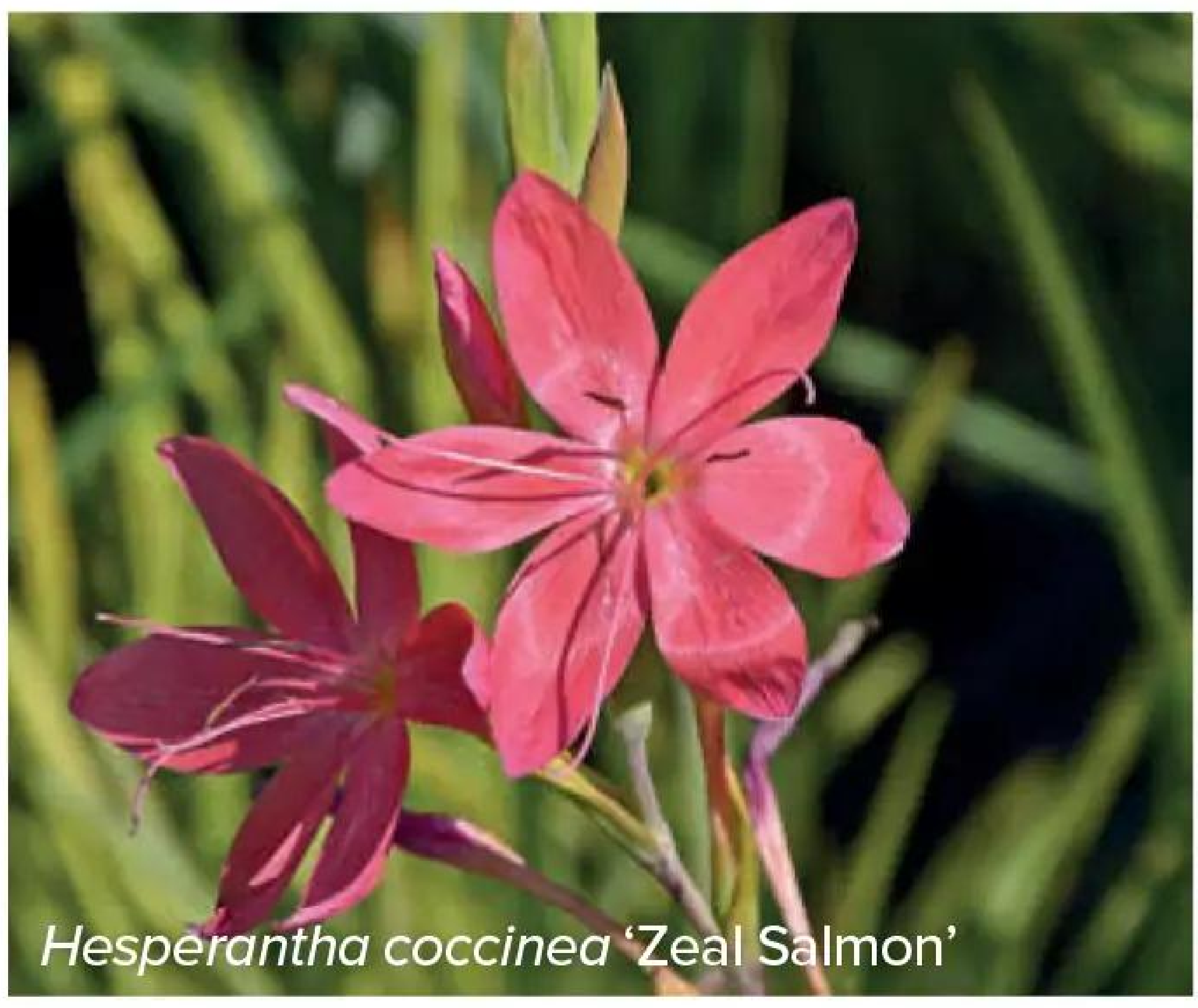
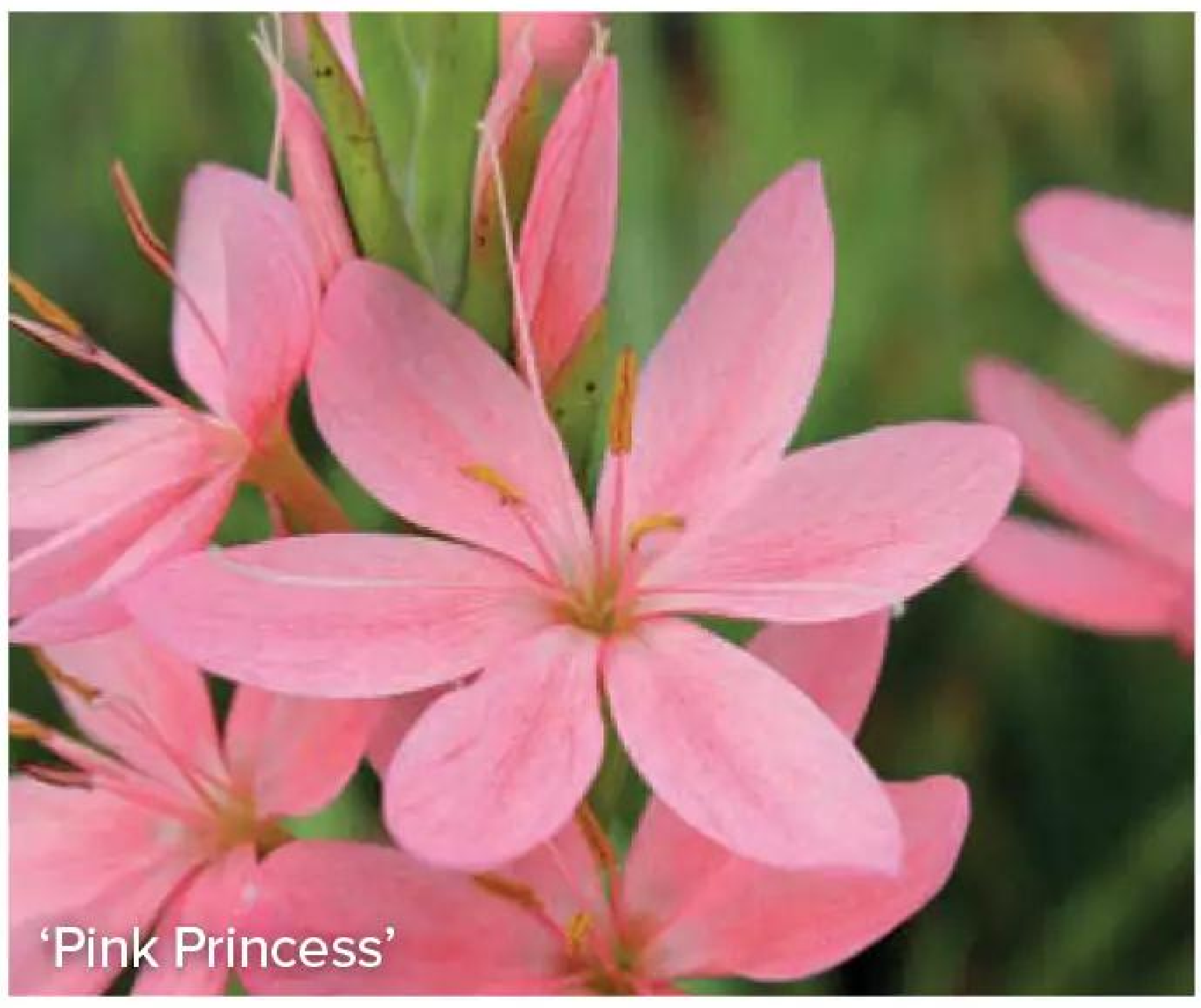

'Oregon Sunset'

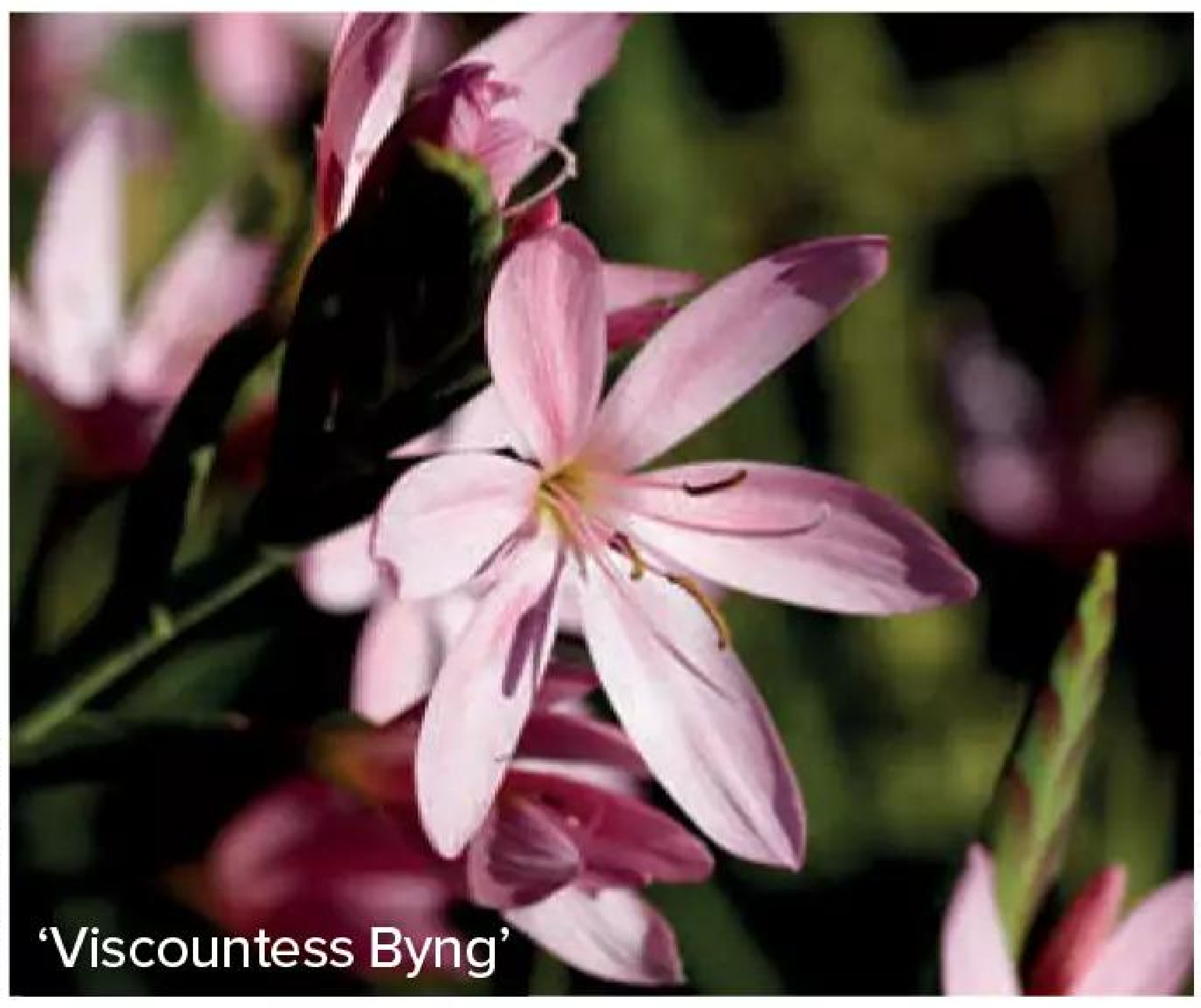

'Mrs Hegarty'


Hesperantha coccinea 'Zeal Salmon'

SHUTTERSTOCK


'Pink Princess'

SHUTTERSTOCK


'Viscountess Byng'

SHUTTERSTOCK

years in spring to maintain vigorous growth and flowering. This not only propagates the plant but also prevents older clumps from declining in bloom production. With proper care, *Hesperantha* can provide a stunning display of colour in your garden well into the autumn season.

Did you know...

Hesperantha used to be known as *Schizostylis* until the 1990s when scientists discovered their DNA was identical to plants already known as Hesperantha

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** *Hesperantha* thrives in full sun or partial shade. They need moisture-retentive but well-drained soil. If you have clay soil, incorporate some grit when planting.

✿ **Planting:** Plant in spring or buy as ready-potted plants in autumn. Add plenty of compost to the soil when planting. For clay soils, mix in some grit for better drainage.

✿ **Care:** Mulch in spring with compost or grit to retain moisture over the summer. Cut back any old growth in spring. These plants are not suitable for dry soils - consider nerines as an alternative in such conditions.

✿ **Winter protection:** *Hesperantha* is hardy to between -5°C and -10°C, but winter wet is their main enemy. Create a dry mulch of chipped bark in a mound over the plant to help water drain away. Alternatively, grow in pots and bring under cover in winter.

✿ **Propagation:** Divide clumps every 3-4 years in spring to help prevent a decline in flowering in older clumps.

Pests & diseases

Hesperantha is generally robust, but watch out for slug damage to new growth in spring.

Michaelmas daisies

Symphyotrichum

Plant: spring or autumn

Position: full sun to part shade

Hardiness: -20°C to -30°C

Propagate: division or cuttings

To brighten the shortening days and help pollinators, try the astonishing range of asters

Commonly known as Michaelmas daisies or simply ‘asters’, *Symphyotrichum* offers an astonishing range of autumn-flowering perennials that are far from common. These impressive plants come in hundreds of varieties, ranging from 30cm to 2m in height, with single and double daisy-like blooms that shine when most other perennials are running out of steam.

Since North American native species were first brought to Europe by colonists in 1710, breeders have developed an extensive palette of colours, new flower shapes, and diverse growth habits. The result is a spectacular array of plants suitable for any garden situation, from compact varieties perfect for containers to tall, statuesque forms that add drama to the back of borders.

Symphyotrichum, previously classified under the genus *Aster*, now includes many North American native species such as *S. novi-belgii* (New York asters) and *S. novae-angliae* (New

> Symphyotrichum, formerly classified as Aster, gets its common name ‘Michaelmas daisy’ from its flowering period, which coincides with the feast of St Michael on September 29th

Top tips

- Plant in groups for maximum impact and to create a pollinator-friendly patch
- Leave seed heads and stems in place after flowering to provide food and shelter for wildlife
- Cut back in early spring to make way for new growth and maintain plant vigour

England asters). These plants typically have smoother leaves and smaller flowers than their European and Asian Aster cousins.

Flowering late in the season, *Symphyotrichum* offers a rainbow of colours beyond just pink and blue. Hues range from pristine whites through soft lavenders to rich purples, with some varieties boasting yellow centres that add an extra pop of colour. They provide an invaluable source of pollen and nectar when much of the garden is beginning to fade, attracting a variety of pollinators including butterflies, bees, and hoverflies.

These versatile perennials thrive in full sun to part shade and prefer free-draining soil that is neither too dry nor too wet. When happy, they reward gardeners with masses of flowers from August through late October. Their long blooming period helps bridge the gap between late summer and autumn, ensuring your garden remains vibrant as the days shorten.

GROWING SYMPHYOTRICHUM

✿ **Hardiness:** Most species are very hardy, some among the most frost-resistant perennials
✿ **Height and spread:** Varies by species, typically 30cm-2m tall
✿ **Soil:** Well-drained, but moisture-retentive
✿ **Aspect:** Full sun to partial shade
✿ **Flowering period:** August to October

Popular varieties:

S. novi-belgii: Wide range of colours, prone to mildew
S. novae-angliae: More mildew-resistant, taller varieties available
***S.* 'Little Carlow'**: Lavender-blue flowers, mildew-resistant
***S. lateriflorum* 'Prince'**: Dark foliage, tiny white flowers with purple centres

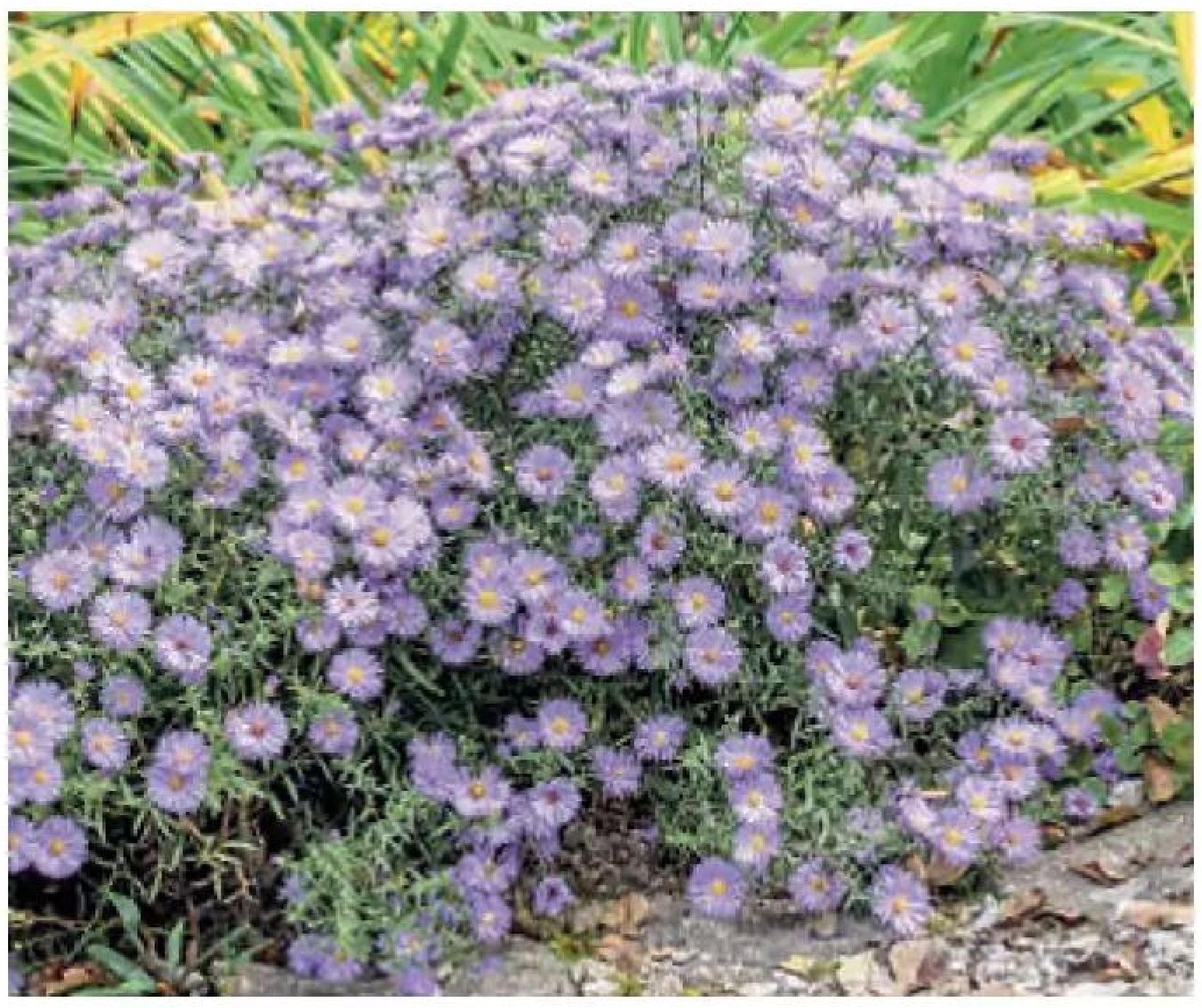
Companion plants:

- Late-flowering perennials like Rudbeckia and Helenium
- Ornamental grasses for texture contrast
- Sanguisorba and Bistorta (*Persicaria*) for complementary flower forms

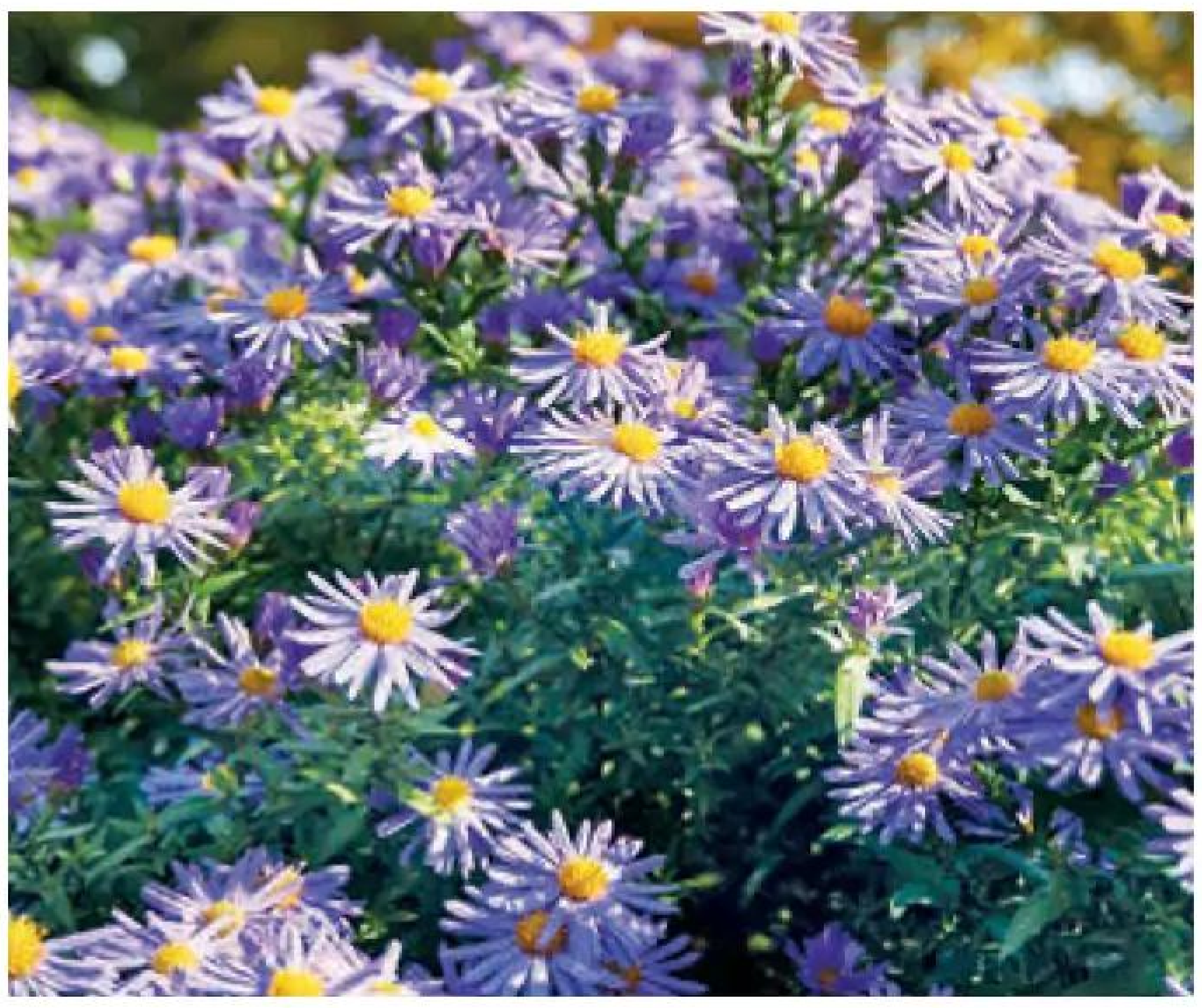
Wildlife value:

- Excellent for pollinators, especially butterflies, bumblebees, honeybees, and hoverflies
- Seed heads provide food for birds in winter
- Stems offer shelter for overwintering insects

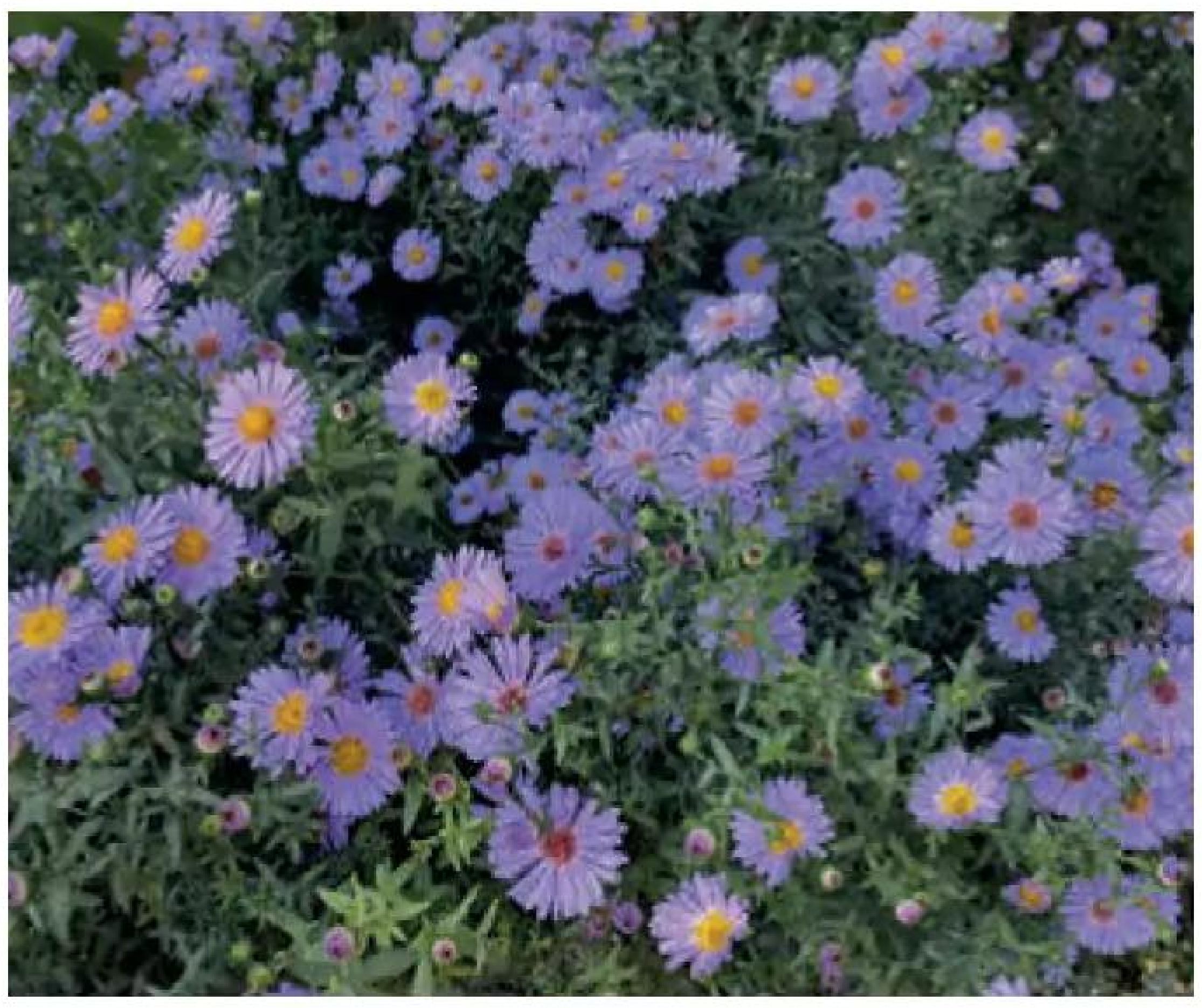
3 FOR FRONT, MIDDLE AND BACK OF BORDERS



'Lady in Blue' (Dwarf)
Low, spreading mounds are covered in semi-double, lavender-blue flowers in late September and October. Ideal in containers and at the front of the border. **Height:** 12in (30cm).



'October Skies' (Dwarf)
Low growing, but spreading clumps covered in lavender-blue daisies with greyish, aromatic foliage. 'Raydon's Favorite' (36in/90cm) is similar, but taller. **Height:** 18in (45cm).

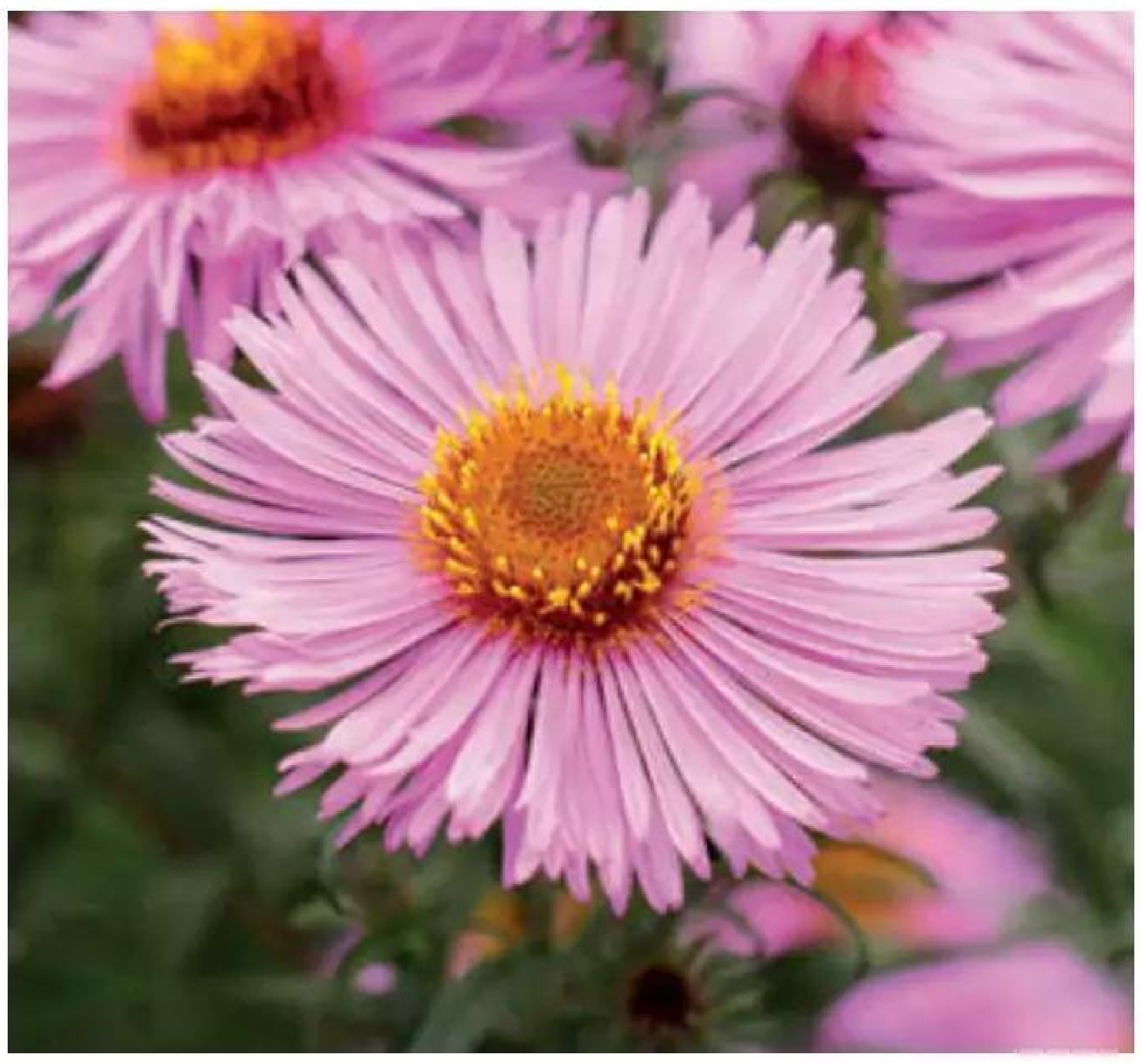


'Calliope' (Tall)
Strong-growing clumps of mildew-resistant, purple-stemmed growth with single, lilac-blue flowers in October. It needs plenty of space.
Height: 79in (2m).

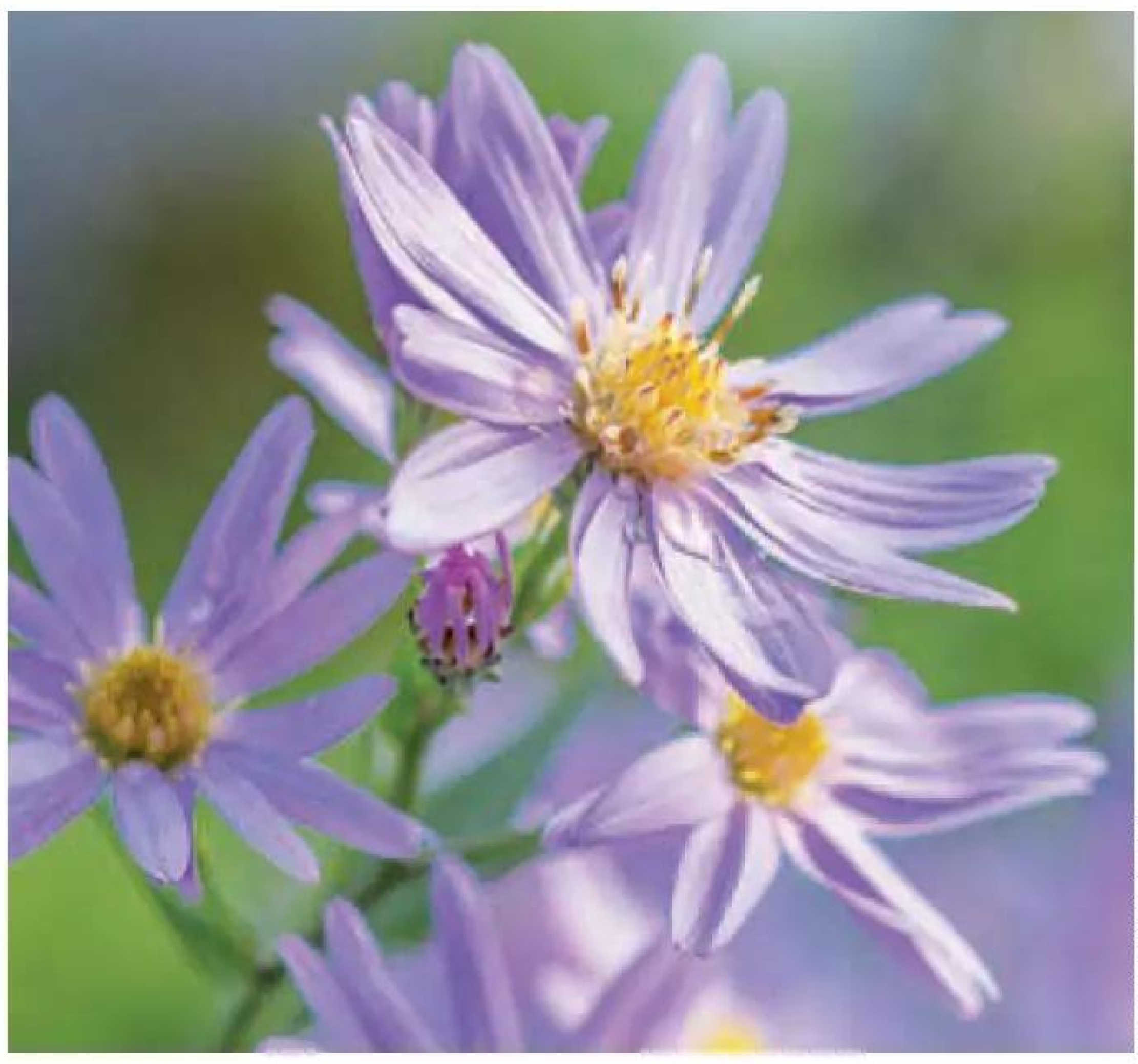
Did you know...

The reclassification of Asters into genera like *Symphyotrichum* reflects modern understanding of plant relationships. European and Asian species remain Aster, while North American natives are now *Symphyotrichum*, with a few becoming *Eurybia*

6 options for borders and cutting

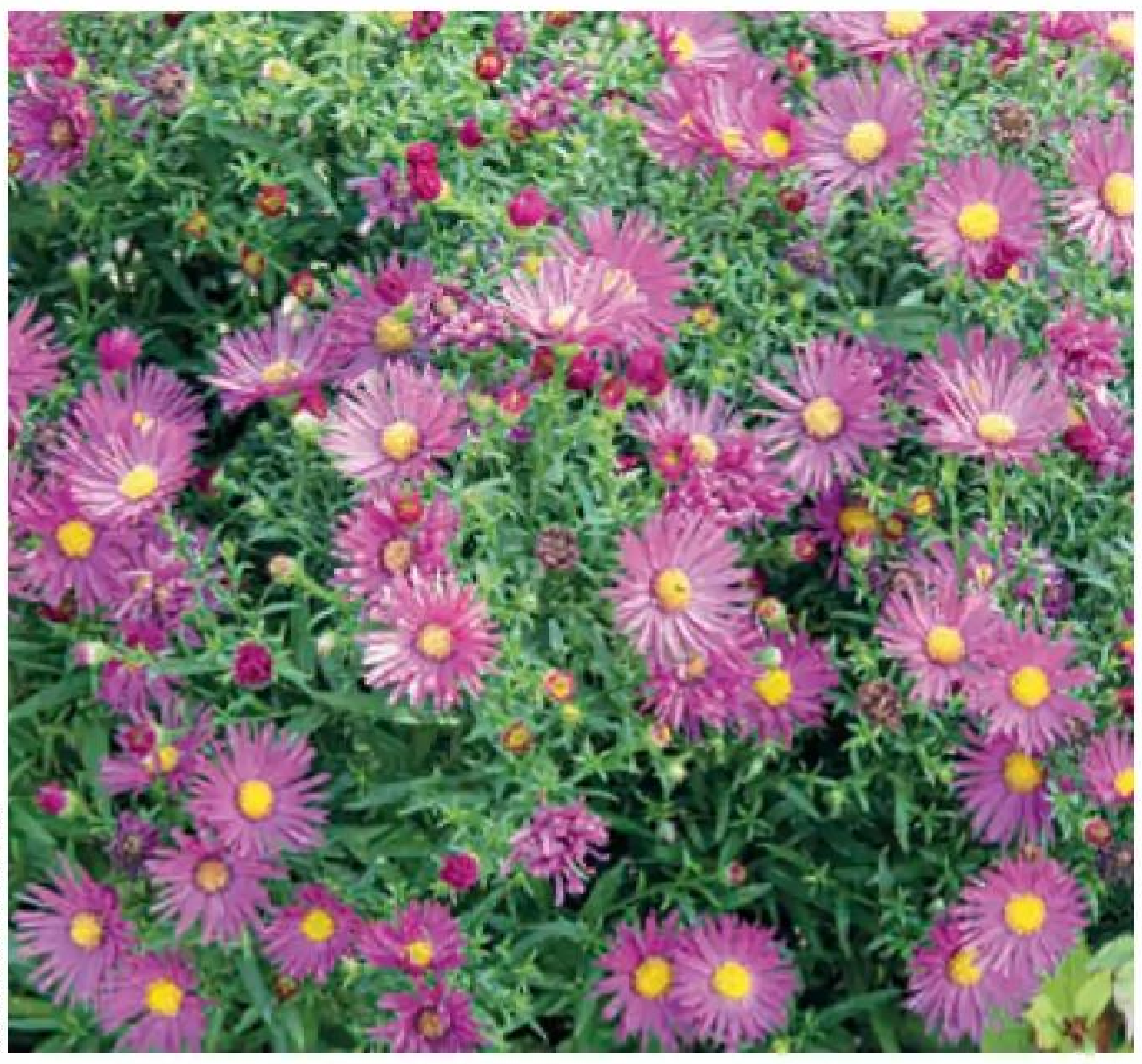


'Harrington's Pink'
Small, pale-pink, semi-double flowers on plants that are a little less vigorous than others of this type. 'Andenken an Alma Pötschke' is a more vivid, pink. **Height:** 51in (1.3m).

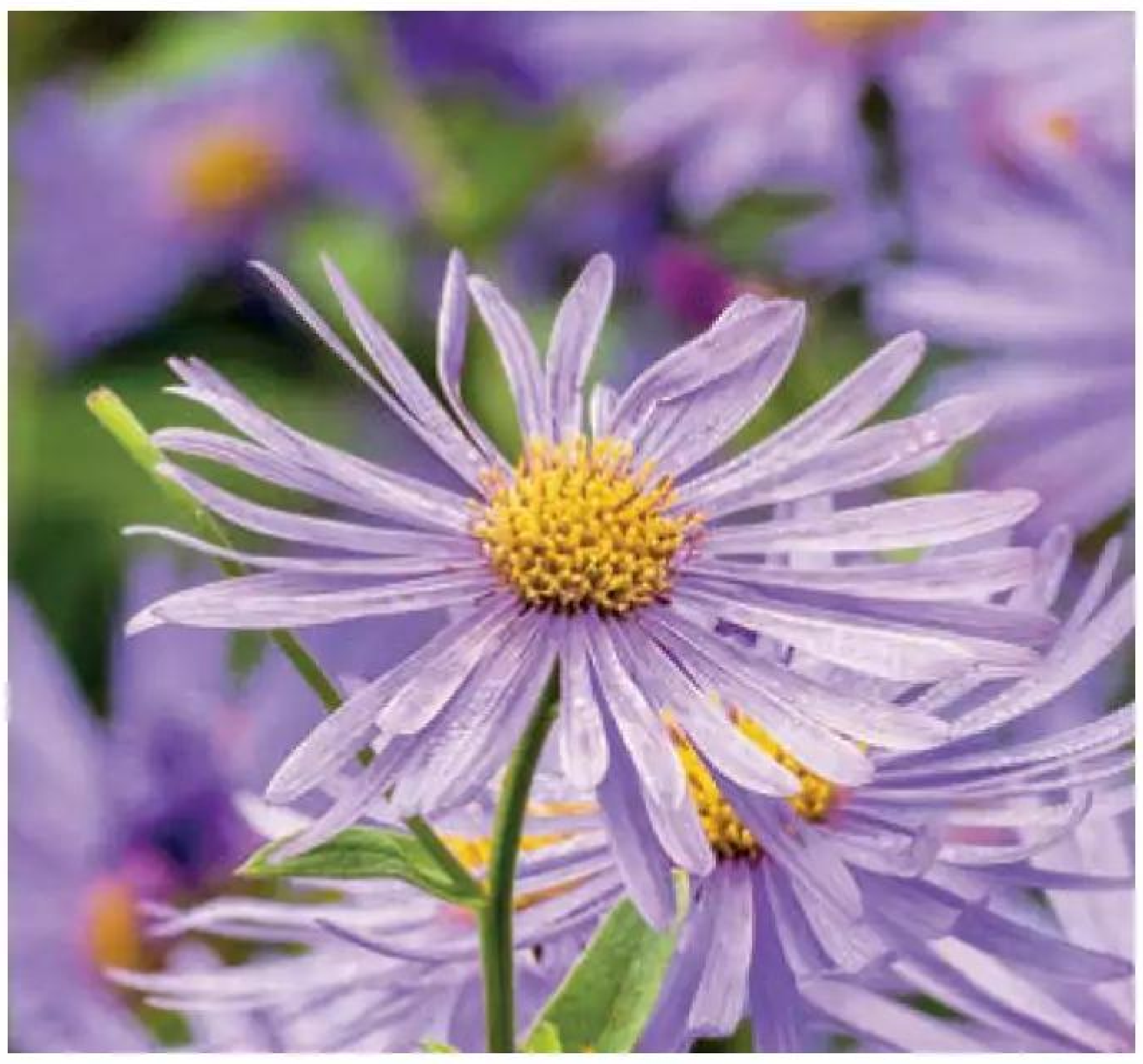


SHUTTERSTOCK

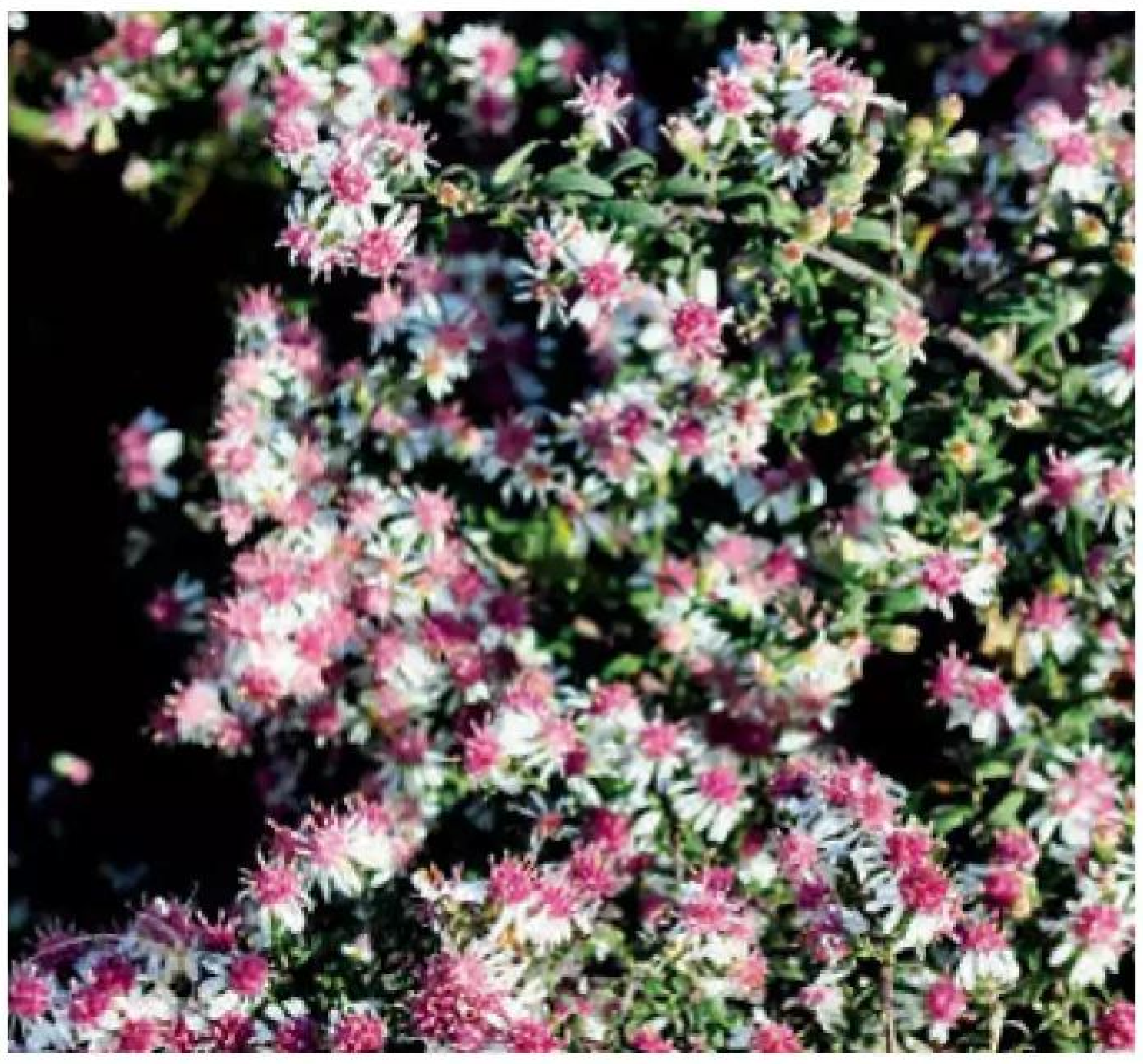
'Little Carlow' AGM
A prolific upright plant with sprays of lavender daisies set against dark-green foliage. Partially resistant to mildew and one of the best varieties of all. **Height:** 47in (1.2m).



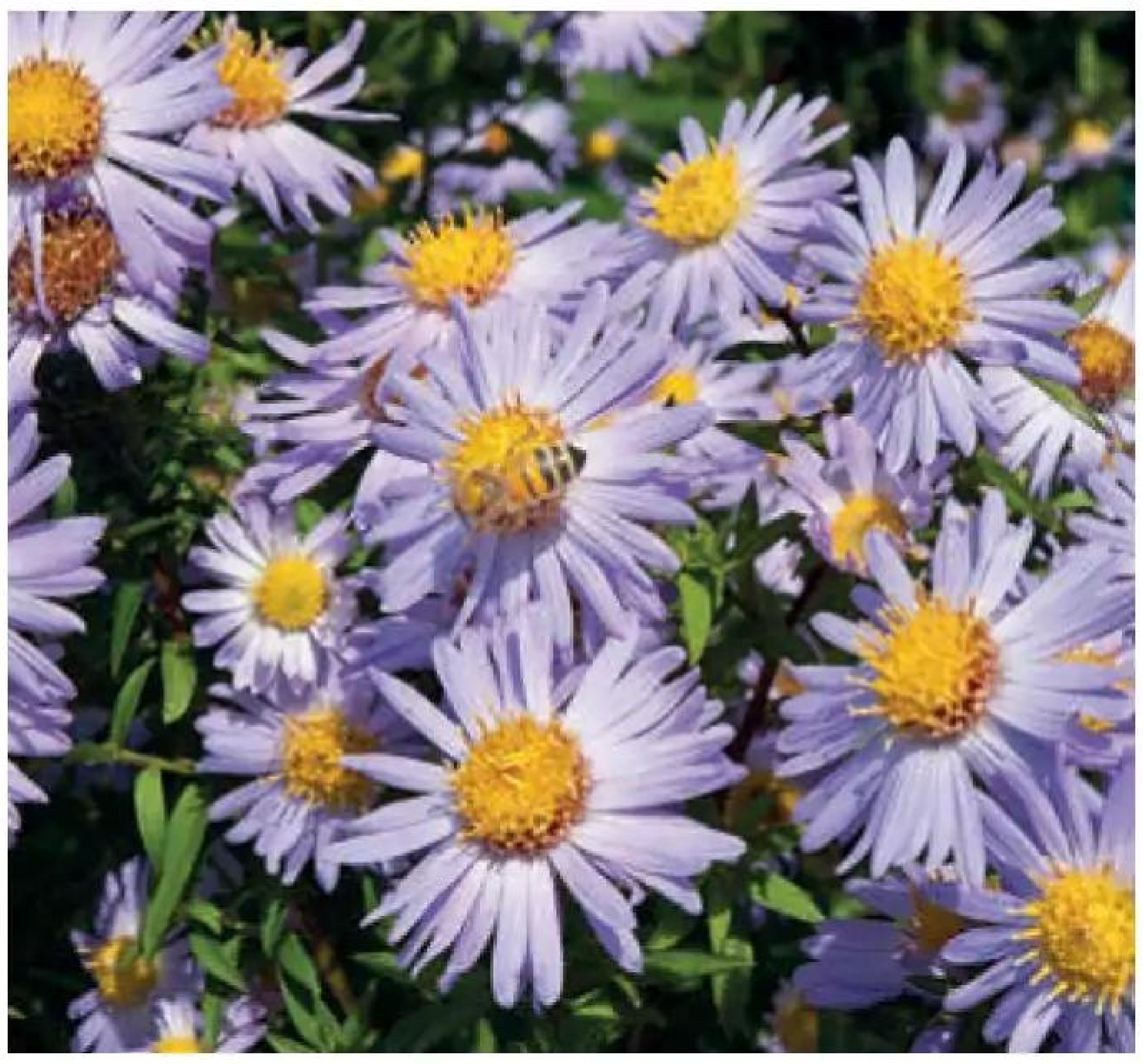
Island Series
Seven varieties with semi-double flowers from August, including: 'Bahamas' (dark pink) shown, 'Barbados' (violet blue), 'Samoa' (pinkish purple), 'Tonga' (bright purple). **Height:** 18-24in (45-60cm).



'Mönch' AGM
This is a vigorous, mildew-resistant plant with large, pale lavender-blue, semi-double daisies that open for many weeks from July to October. 'Wunder von Stäfa'(30in/75cm) is similar, but shorter. **Height:** 36in (90cm).



'Prince'
Bronzed spring foliage becomes deep green, setting off the clouds of small white daisies with purplish centres. Like a taller version of the more familiar var. *horizontalis* but without its angled growth. **Height:** 20in (50cm).



'Ochtendgloren' AGM
This variety develops clouds of soft, purple-pink daisies through October, the flowers opening down to ground level. One of the best of all perennial asters, for borders and for cutting. **Height:** 47in (1.2m).

S. 'White Ladies'

PLANTING AND PROPAGATION

Plant *Symphyotrichum* in spring or early autumn in well-prepared soil enriched with organic matter. Space plants according to their expected mature size, typically 45-60cm apart for most varieties.

Propagation is done via cuttings taken in both spring and autumn, before and after flowering. For home gardeners, division is often the easiest method. Divide established clumps every 3-4 years in spring to maintain vigour and create new plants. Lift the entire clump, then carefully separate it into smaller sections, each with roots and shoots. Replant immediately and water well.

Some varieties may self-seed if flower heads are left on the plant. These volunteers can be carefully dug up and transplanted in spring.

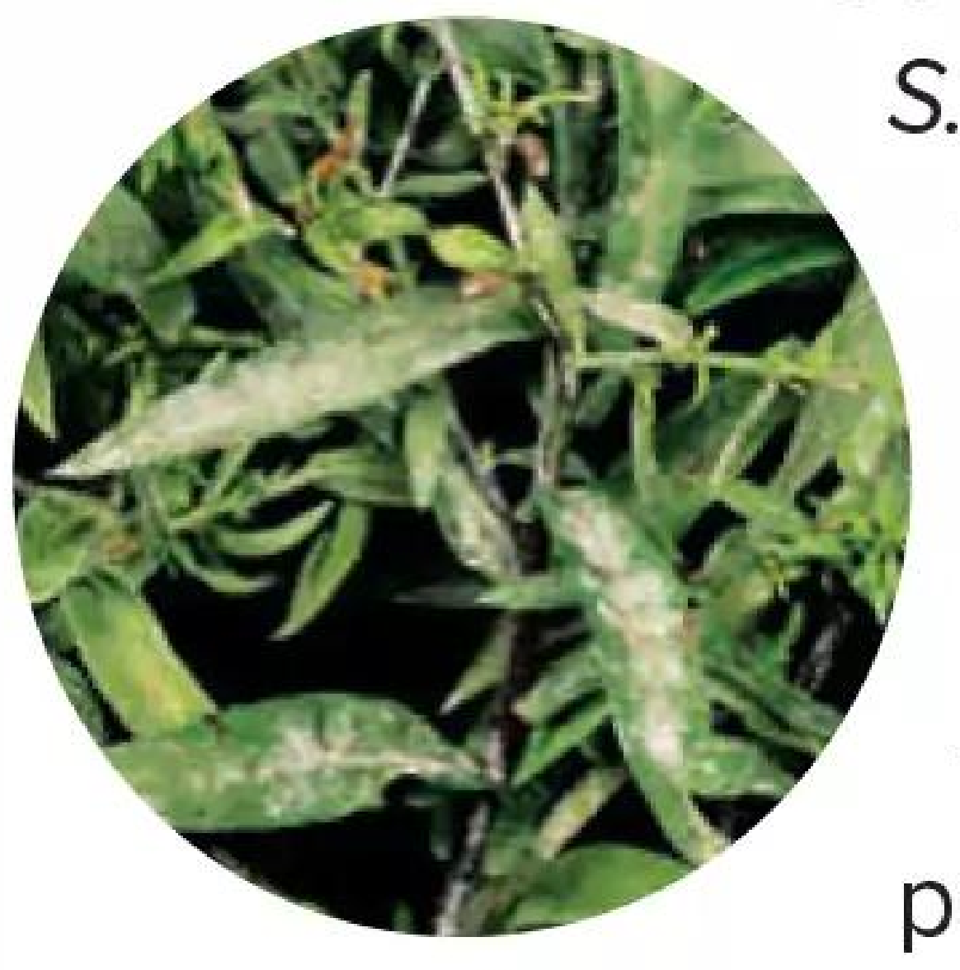
For a continuous display, consider planting a mix of early, mid-season, and late-flowering varieties. This will extend the blooming period and provide a longer-lasting food source for pollinators.

When planting, consider the eventual height of your chosen varieties. Taller types may need staking in exposed positions, while shorter varieties are excellent for the front of borders or containers.

Symphyotrichum combines beautifully with other late-season stars such as Rudbeckia, Helenium, ornamental grasses, Sanguisorba, and Bistorta. Whether used in mixed borders, prairie-style plantings, or containers, these plants offer reliable colour and structure well into autumn.

Maintenance

Cut back flowering stems in early spring before new growth emerges. Mulch annually with well-rotted compost or manure. Water deeply during dry spells, especially when plants are establishing.

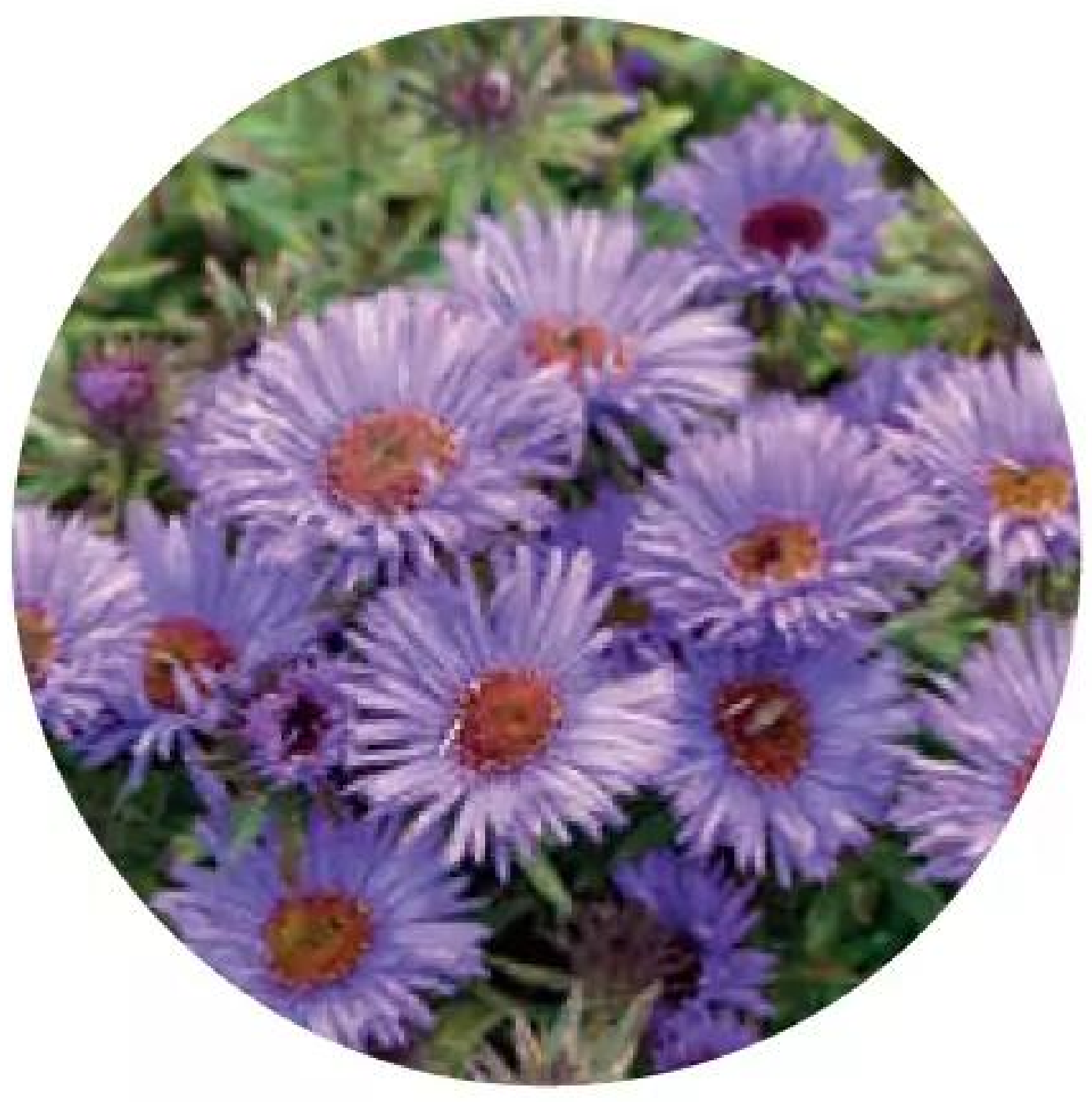


Some varieties, particularly *S. novi-belgii*, are prone to powdery mildew. Ensure good air circulation and consider resistant varieties if this is a persistent problem.

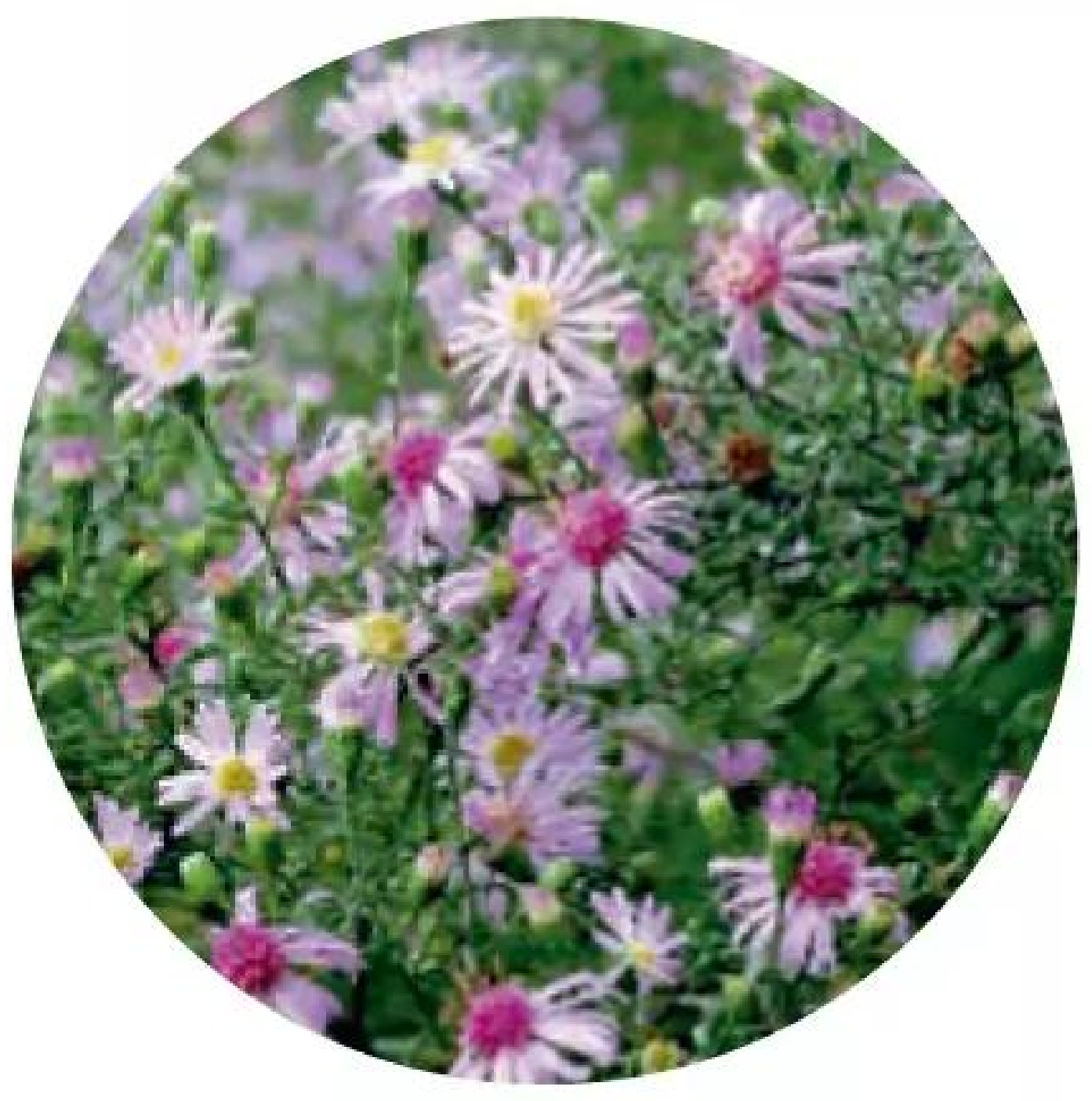
How to... To create pollinator-friendly planting

Combine various *Symphyotrichum* species and cultivars with late-flowering perennials and ornamental grasses. Plant in drifts rather than formal arrangements, allowing plants to mingle. This low-maintenance approach not only looks stunning but also provides excellent habitat for wildlife throughout autumn and winter

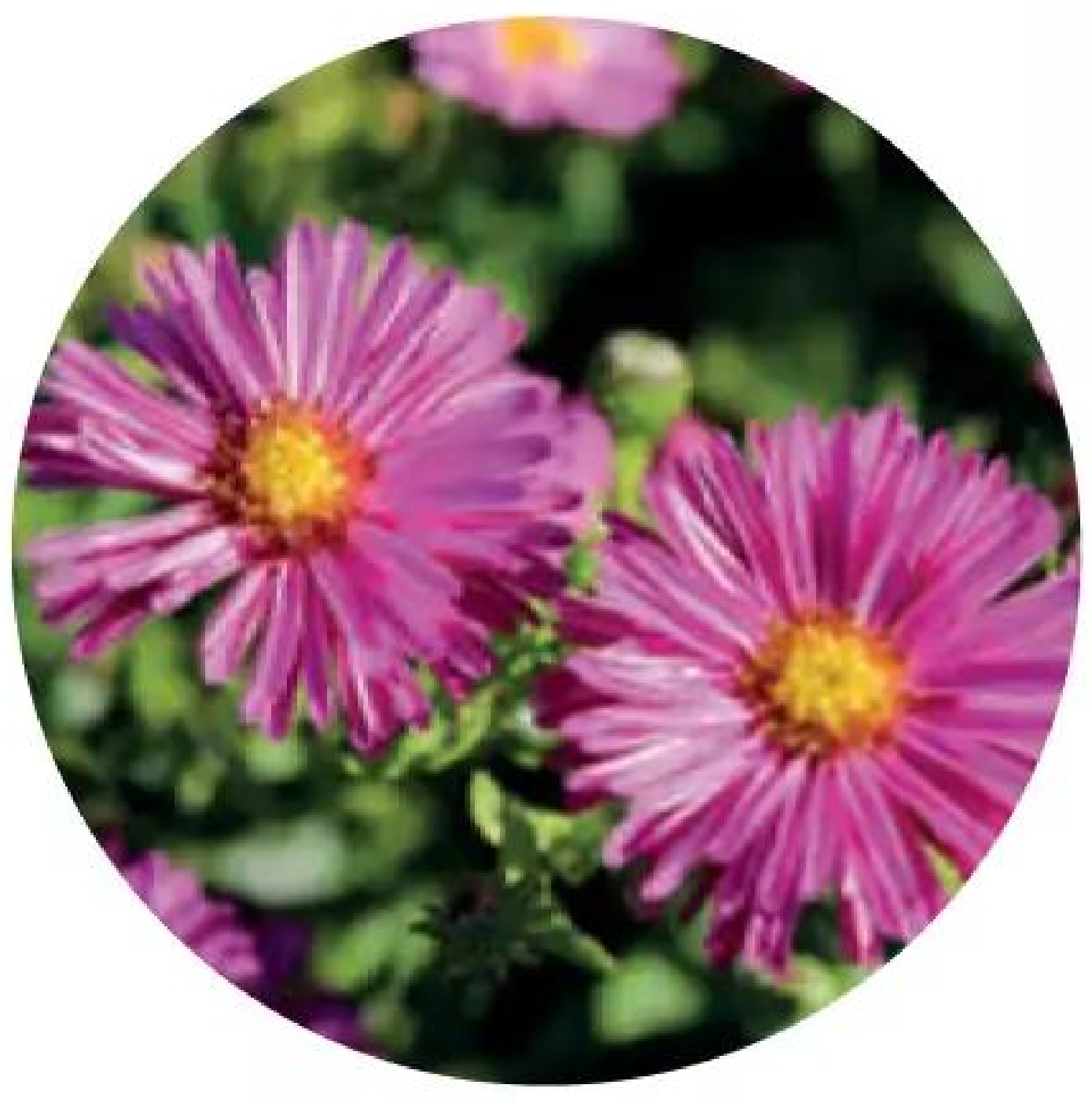
Plant together



'Purple dome'
A compact, clump-forming perennial with an upright but domed habit that reaches around 60cm in height. It bears semi-double, purple flowers with yellow centres in autumn. Height and spread: 50-100cm x 10-50cm



***Symphyotrichum* 'Coombe Fishacre'**
A spreading, bushy perennial with sprays of delicate lilac-pink flowers in late summer and autumn. Height and spread: 1m x 50cm (39 x 18in).



***Symphyotrichum novi-belgii* 'Jenny'**
A rhizomatous perennial about 30-40cm tall, forming a compact clump of erect stems bearing narrow leaves and panicles of reddish-purple, semi-double to double flowerheads to 5cm across, from late summer to autumn.

Indestructibles

Plant: spring or autumn

Position: varies (sun to shade)

Hardiness: varies (-10°C to -20°C)

Propagate: varies (division, cuttings, seed)

If you're looking for low-maintenance plants that can withstand challenging conditions, this selection of 'indestructibles' is ideal

These resilient plants fill out quickly and hold their own, withstanding incursions from weeds, drought, cold, and attacks from pests and diseases. They're the survivors you might spot in a neglected garden, thriving where other plants have long since perished.

One of the reasons indestructibles are so popular is the sheer variety they offer. From ground-covering perennials to towering shrubs and climbers – the range of sizes, shapes, and colours is huge.

Most indestructibles are easy to care for and will thrive in a variety of garden situations, from sunny borders to shady corners, creating striking planting combinations or bringing life to overlooked areas. And you don't have to wait long to enjoy the benefits: plant a late-flowering perennial in the spring, and your garden will be filled with blooms that summer.

The best known tend to be the plants that flower in summer, but there is a variety of other beautiful other plants that will bring your garden to life in all seasons. In fact, with a bit of planning and careful selection, it's possible to have indestructible plants providing interest just about every month of the year.

***Achillea filipendulina* 'Gold Plate' AGM**
Will fill a large sunny space, making a sizable clump of new growth in spring. In summer, stiff stems bear slightly domed heads of yellow flowers. The contrast of vertical stems and flattish heads is appealing and these persist as seedheads. **HxS:** 4x2ft (1.2mx60cm).

ALAMY

***Anemone x hybrida* 'Königin Charlotte' AGM**
Can be a little invasive, but will move into spaces where fussier plants have died off. Tall, self-supporting stems are topped in late summer by large, fluttering blooms. Plant in sun or partial shade. HxS: 5ftx30in (1.5mx75cm).

Salvia forsskaolii
Easily raised from seed, sun-loving indigo woodland sage will grow on light, sandy soils and rich clay ones. Happy to self-seed, a rosette of large leaves forms, from which branched spikes of large flowers open during summer. **H&S:** 3x2ft (1mx60cm).

ALAMY

***Eryngium x zabelii* 'Blue Waves'**
Sea hollies are durable whatever the soil. Even short-lived *E. giganteum* returns regularly by reproducing itself by seed. 'Blue Waves' creates rosettes of foliage and plenty of lacy thistlelike heads of vibrant mauve-blue. Grow in full sun. **HxS:** 20x12in (50x30cm).

ALAMY

***Hylotelephium* 'Matrona' AGM**
A useful sedum or stonecrop with flattish clusters of pale-pink flowers opening from summer into autumn. Good for insects and persist well as seedheads. Plants are sun-loving and propagate readily from cuttings or division. **H&S:** 18in (45cm).

ALAMY

***Salvia x sylvestris* 'Schneehügel'**
This sun-loving sage makes a dense, low, wide mound of stems with spires of white flowers from early summer to autumn that are great for bees and other insects. It is a good edging plant, dying back in winter and growing again in spring. **HxS:** 18x24in (45x60cm).

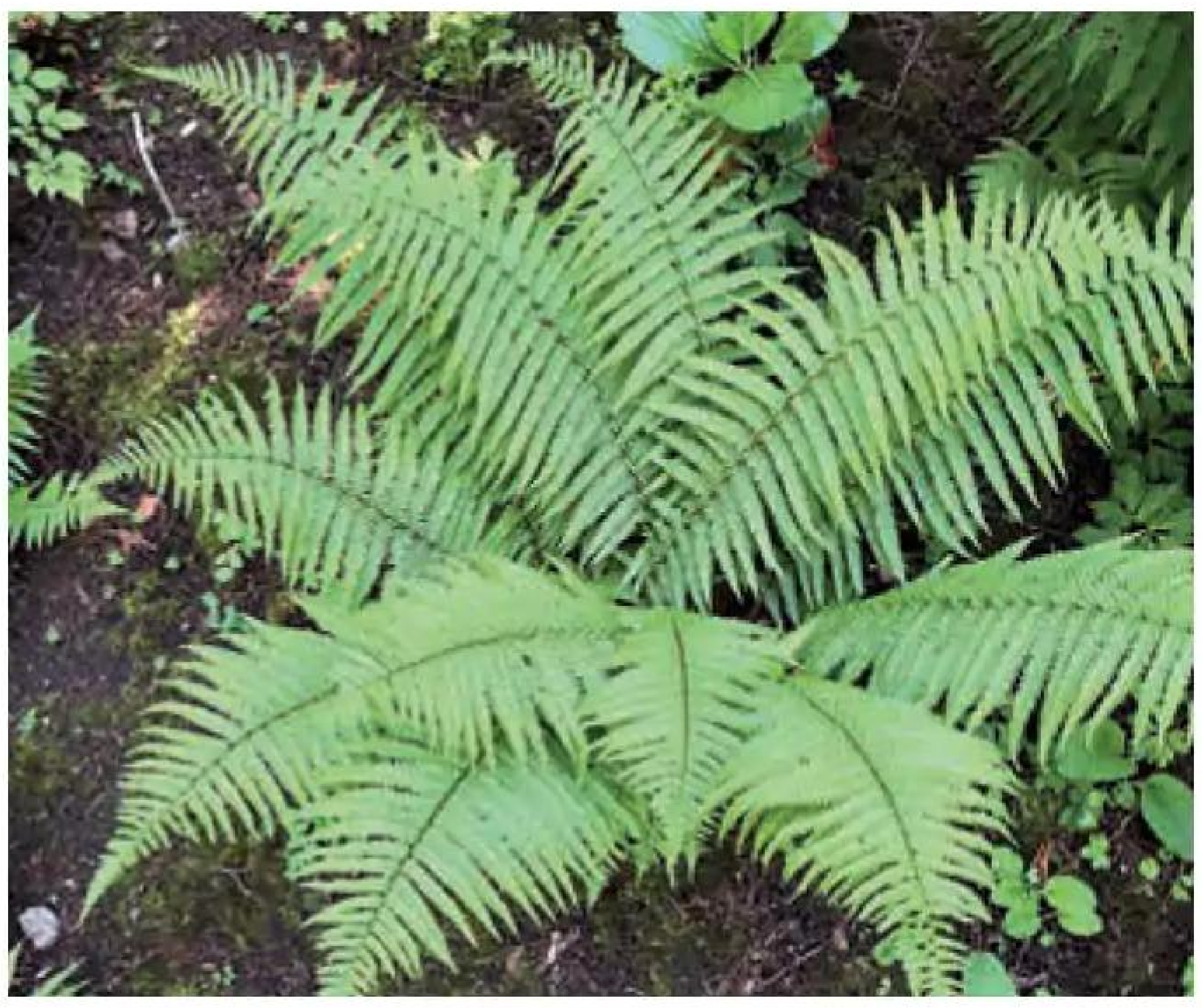
ALAMY

***Forsythia x intermedia* 'Lynwood' AGM**
Cut stems of forsythia in bud and force them indoors as cut flowers. Plants are improved by pruning straight after flowering, but leaving them unpruned does no harm. Summer cuttings root readily and there are usually good purplish autumn tints. **H&S:** 8ft (2.5m).

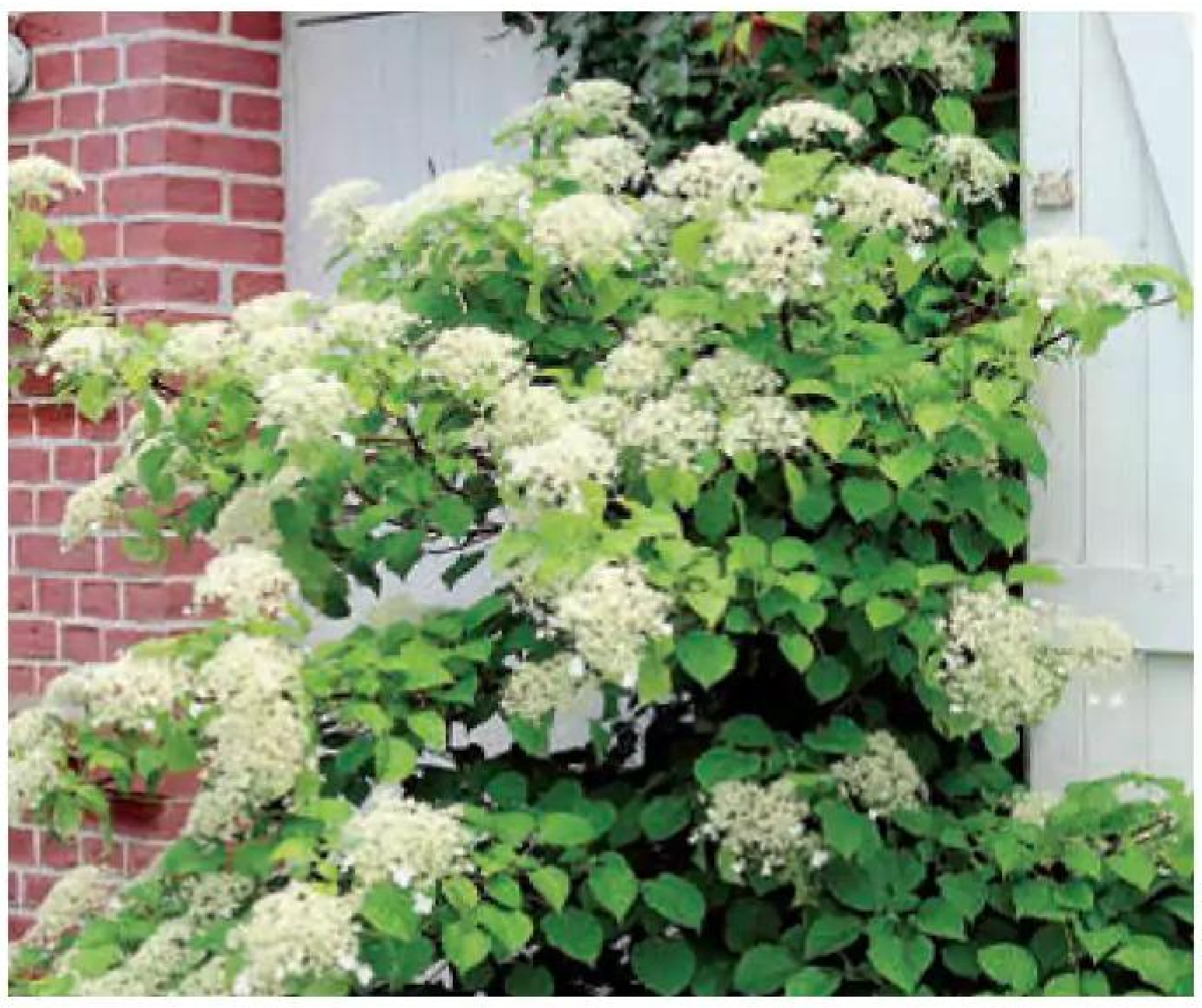
***Clematis* 'Lambton Park' AGM**
Pendant yellow blooms open in early summer and will continue into autumn. Redolent of coconut, these are followed by silvery seedheads. Responds well to hard pruning in early spring, but will perform just as well left to romp up a tree or trellis. **H&S:** 12ft (3.6m).

***Rosa* 'Pink Flower Carpet' ('Noatraum') AGM**
Disease resistant, vigorous and smothered in clusters of double rose-pink flowers until autumn, it is dense enough to fend off weeds or other plants. The only downside is that it has little or no scent. **HxS:** 3x4ft (1x1.2m).

4 PLANTS FOR SHADE

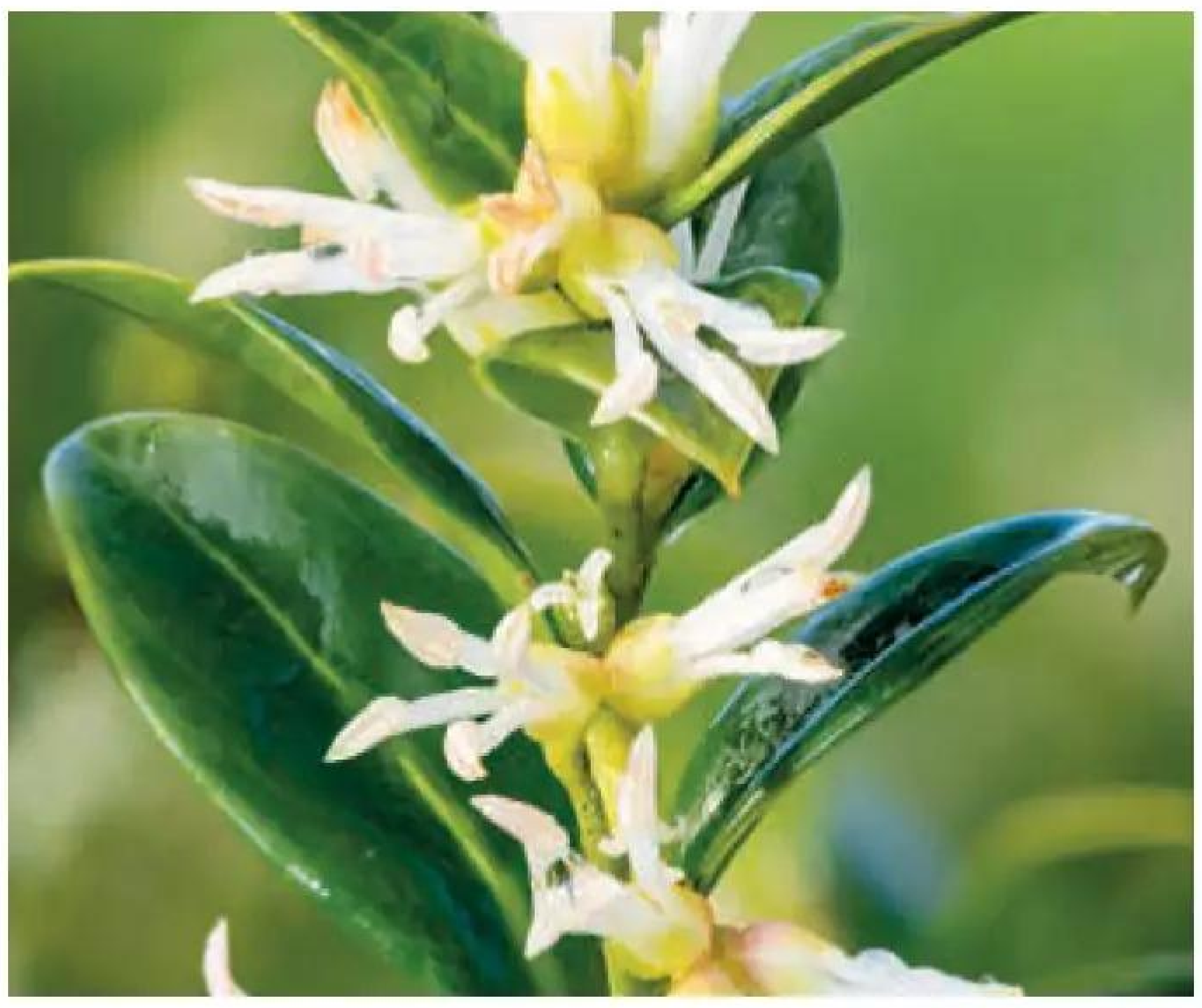


Dryopteris affinis **AGM**
The scaly or golden male fern makes a large semi-evergreen specimen. New fronds arise in shuttlecock formation and widen out just as weed growth starts, so that the fern holds its own well and tends to swamp encroaching growth from other plants. Grow in partial to full shade. **H&S:** 3ft (1m).

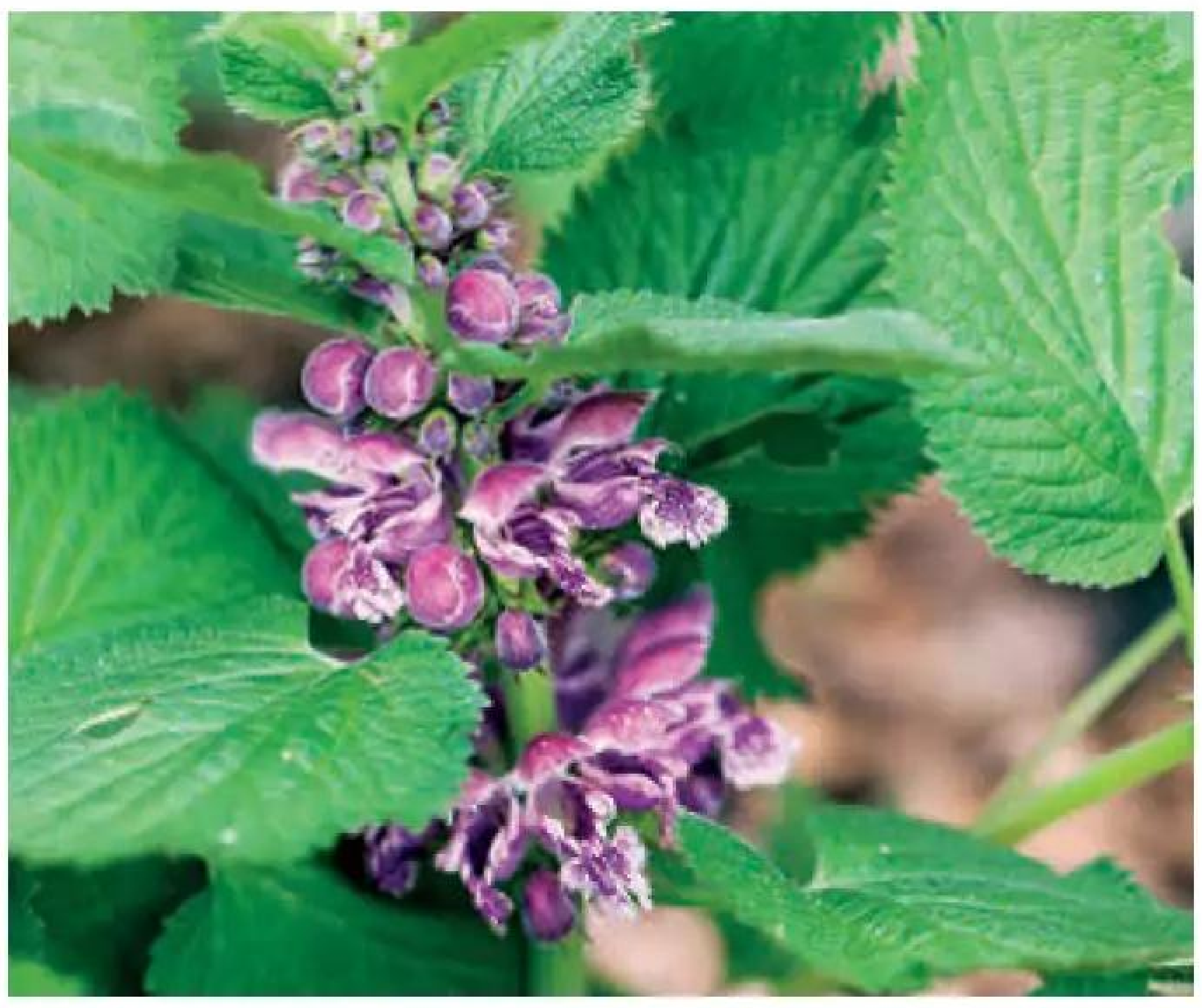


ALAMY

Hydrangea anomala **subsp. *petiolaris*** **AGM**
A climbing hydrangea might be the ultimate solution for a north-facing wall, but in fact it will self-cling and open its summer flowers against any wall, fence or tree. Plants mope at the base for a while, producing stems, before swarming up to produce their white, lacy flowerheads. **H&S:** 30ft (10m).



Sarcococca confusa **AGM**
This makes a dense thicket of evergreen foliage that holds its space well. By autumn, buds form along stems opening in winter to reveal small white flowers emitting a sweet perfume. Pruning is not strictly necessary. Plants grow in any soil and dappled to heavy shade. **H&S:** 5ft (1.5m).



Lamium orvala
This showy dead-nettle is one of the best plants for dry shade, and once established sends up fresh stems each year, bearing crinkled leaves and from late spring into summer. Plants are non-invasive but the rhizomes and roots make a solid barrier to help prevent incursions from other plants. **H&S:** 2x1ft (60x30cm).

GROWING ADVICE

Indestructibles enjoy a range of conditions, from full sun to shade, depending on the species. Whether this is on a bright border or in a shady corner, 'right plant, right place' is a pretty good maxim.

Although planting in autumn is often ideal, many are bought and planted in spring. They will need more attention to watering, ensuring that the roots do not dry out in their first summer.

Most indestructibles develop a large root system, so they appreciate thorough preparation. Dig a hole 12-18in (30-45cm) across and deep, retaining the top layer of dark, fertile soil and discarding any subsoil. Add compost, plus a general fertiliser, and mix it into the base of the hole. Plant with the surface of the compost 2-3in (5-7.5cm) below the surrounding soil level, then fill with improved soil. Finally, firm well and water-in generously with liquid fertiliser.

Most indestructibles require minimal pruning, although certain shrubs benefit from pruning after flowering to maintain shape. Remove dead or diseased growth as needed.

Top tips

- Allow space for plants to reach their full size
- Consider mixing evergreen and deciduous plants for year-round interest

Did you know... Many indestructible plants have adaptations that help them survive in challenging conditions. For example, plants from Mediterranean regions often have silvery, hairy leaves to conserve moisture

ALL YEAR ROUND FLOWERS

Winter wonders

Plenty of plants provide winter interest with flowers, scent, colour and architectural form

✿ Camellia ✿ Viburnum ✿ Hellebore ✿ Cornus
✿ Winter scent ✿ Cyclamen ✿ Heather
✿ Foliage ✿ Grasses

Camellias

Camellia sp.

Plant: autumn/ spring

Position: partial shade

Hardiness: to -15°C

Propagate: mid/late summer – late winter

Easy to grow, with glossy evergreen leaves, Camellia flowers bring early-season colour

Camellias are evergreen woodland plants originally from India, China, and Japan. They were first introduced to England in the mid-18th century and considered delicate and tropical until they proved otherwise! Depending on the variety, the delightfully showy flowers can appear over a long period, generally from mid-winter to late spring. They are mostly tolerant of cold, wet winters, and their glossy evergreen foliage stands out very nicely.

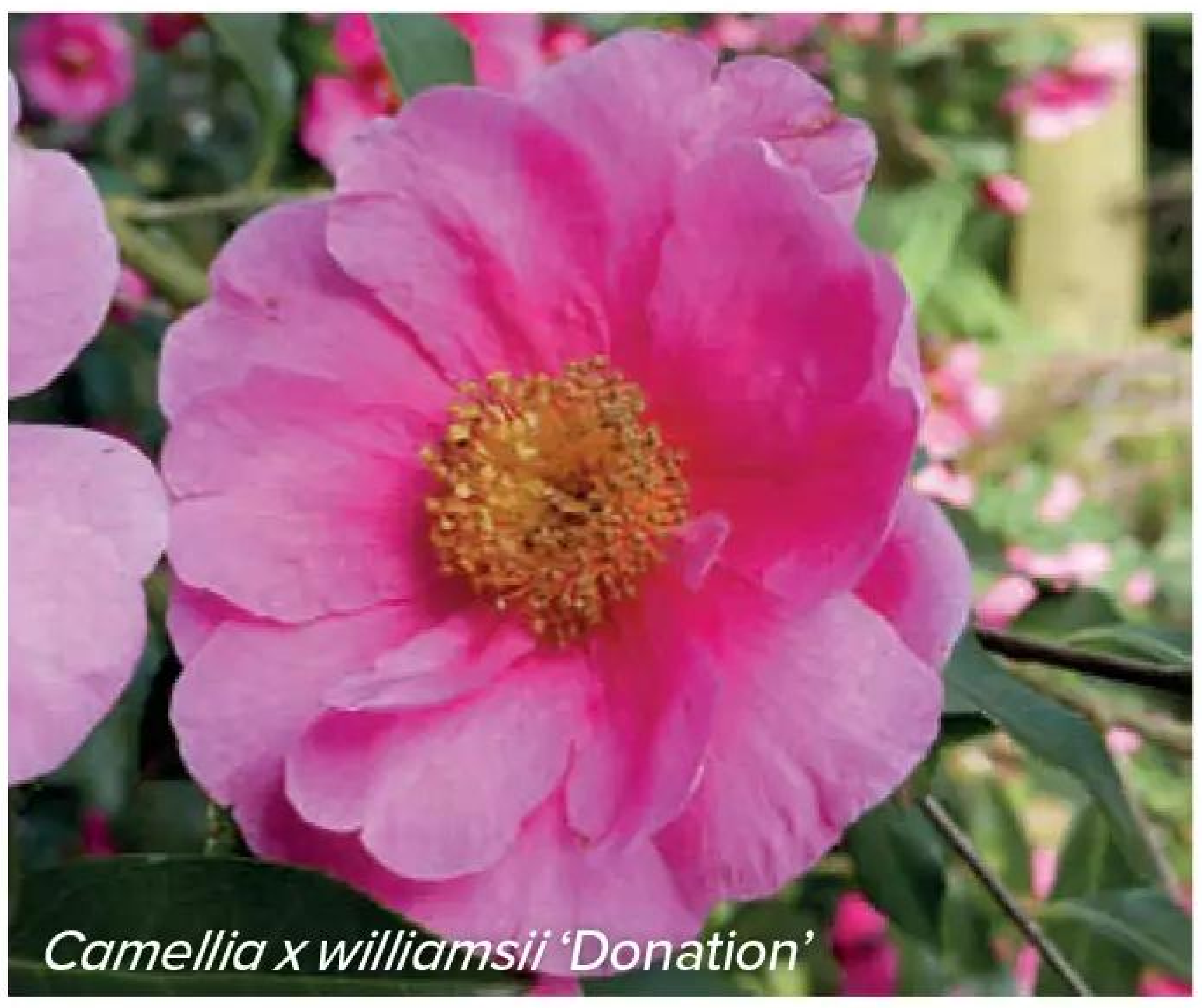
Choose your planting site carefully to ensure the early morning sun doesn't fall on frozen flowers, or they'll turn brown and die. Make sure the plant doesn't receive direct sunlight until much later in the morning.

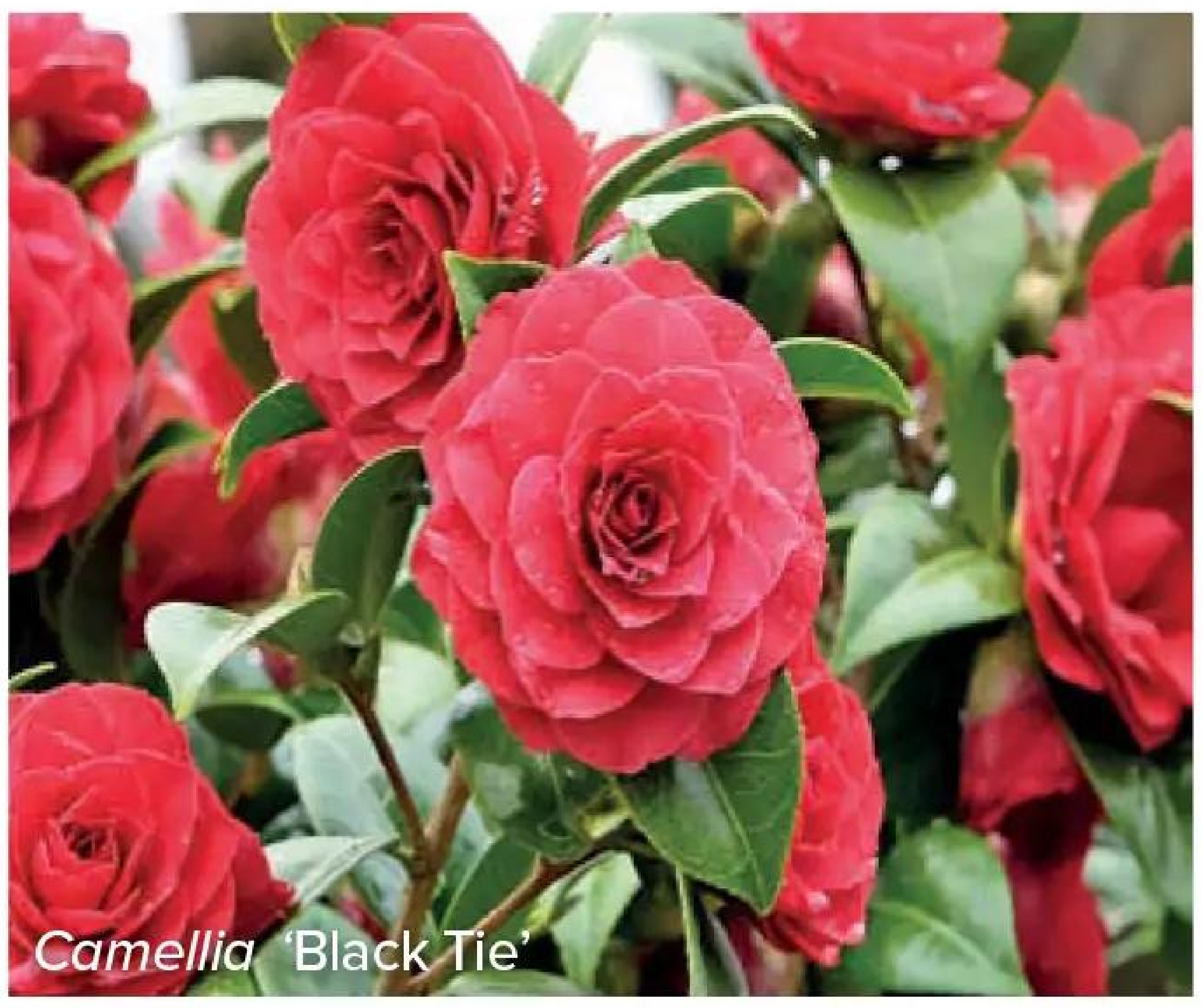
Camellias grow well in light shade, but they flower better with a reasonable amount of sunlight. They are ideal for lightly shaded walls, and some more lax varieties can even be trained onto them.

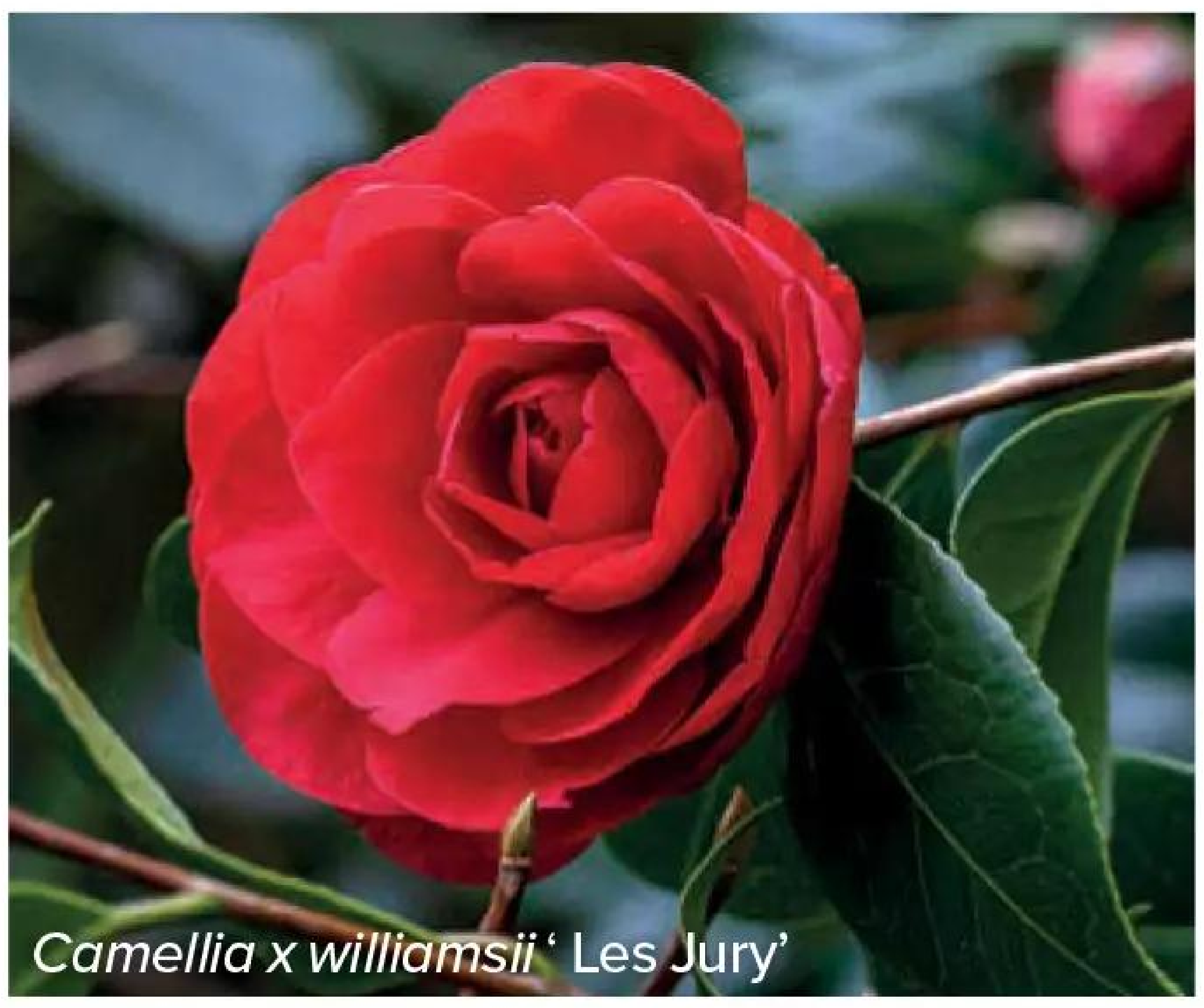
There are dozens of species and varieties to choose from, ranging in colour from white and yellow to deep red through various shades of pink. Flower forms range from single to peony.

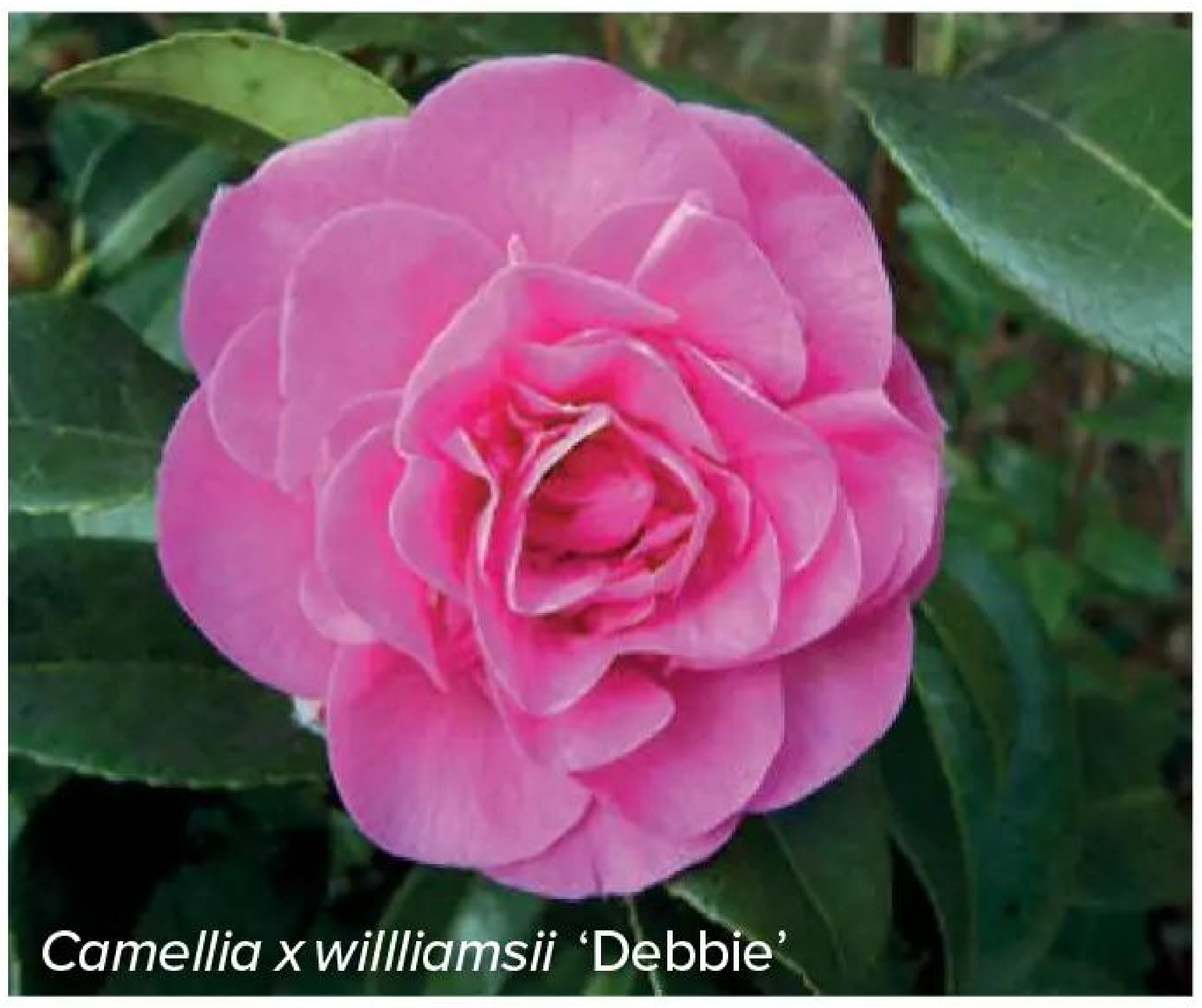
Top tips

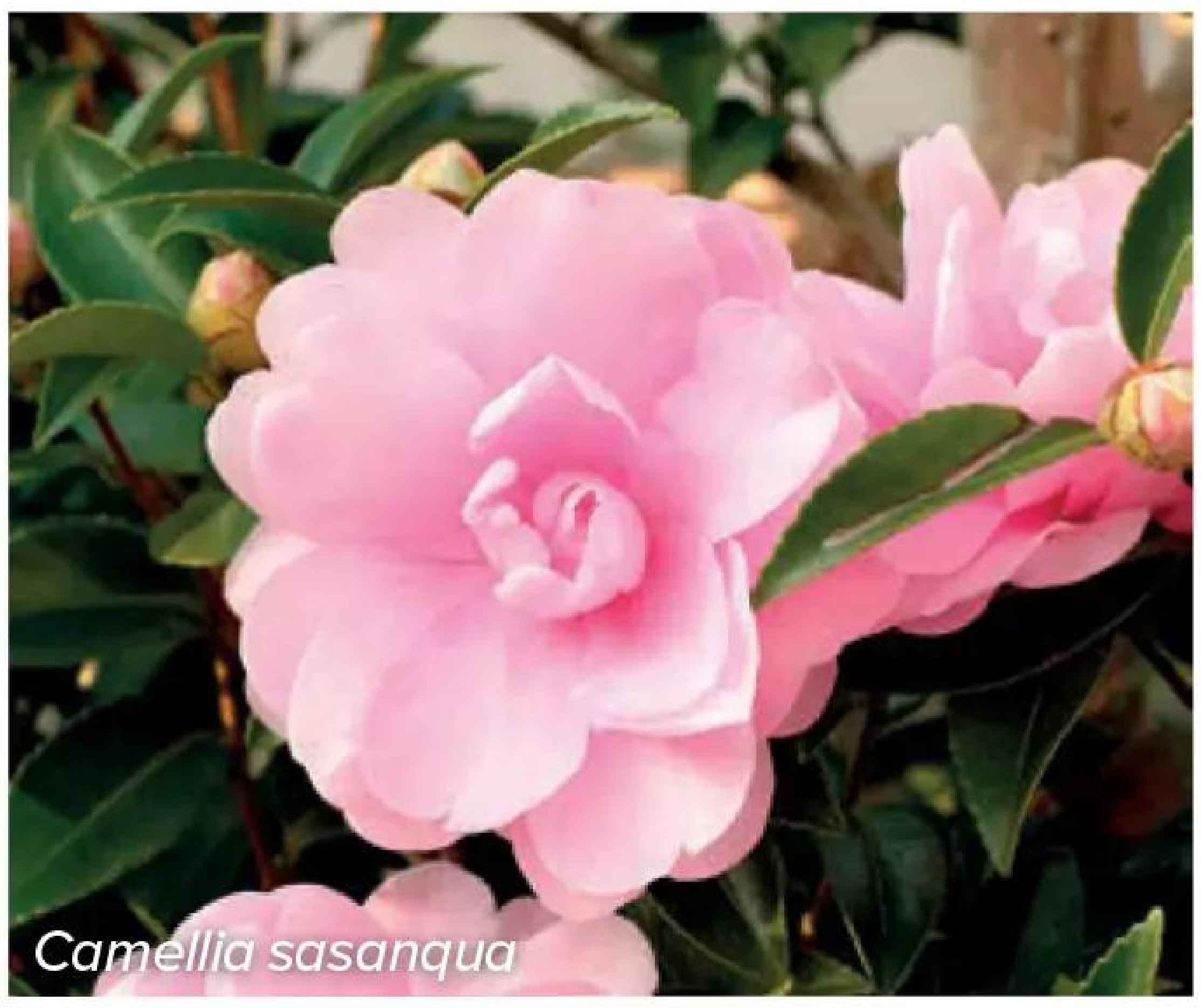
- *Camellia sasanqua* has some scented varieties and flowers in the autumn/winter
- Most *Camellia x williamsii* varieties drop their dead flowers
- Plant different varieties to have a growing season that lasts from early to late summer

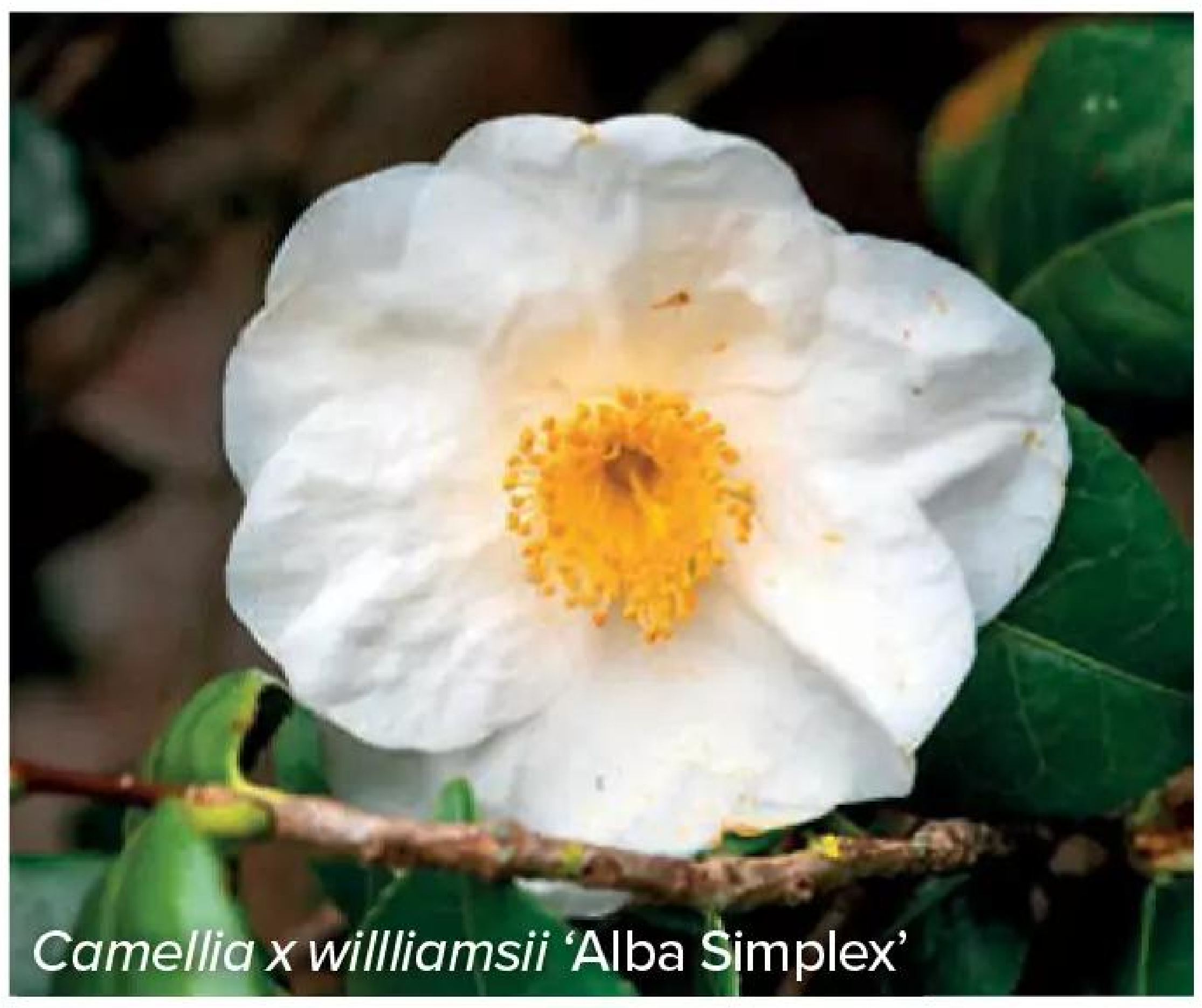

Camellia x williamsii ‘Donation’

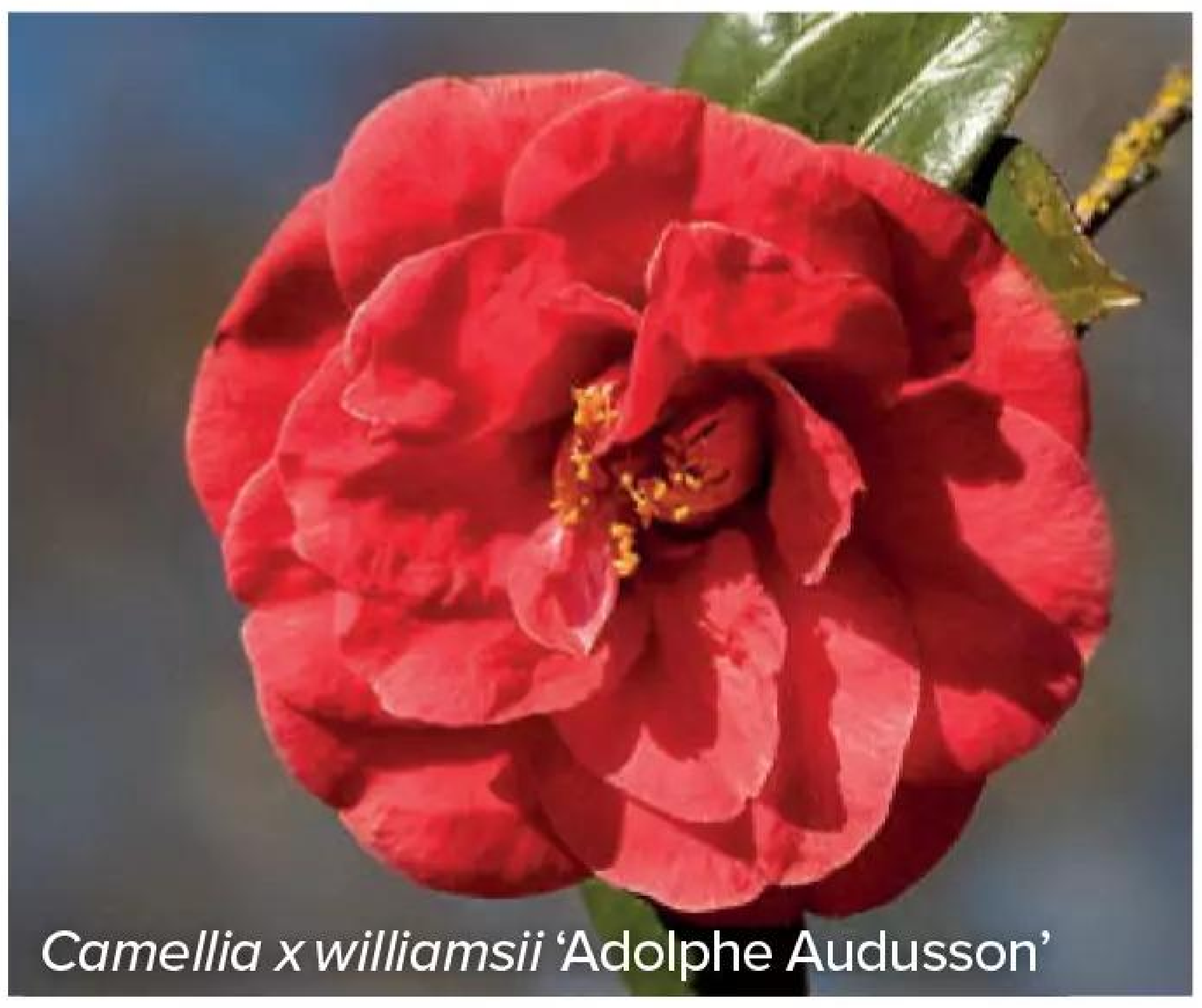

Camellia ‘Black Tie’

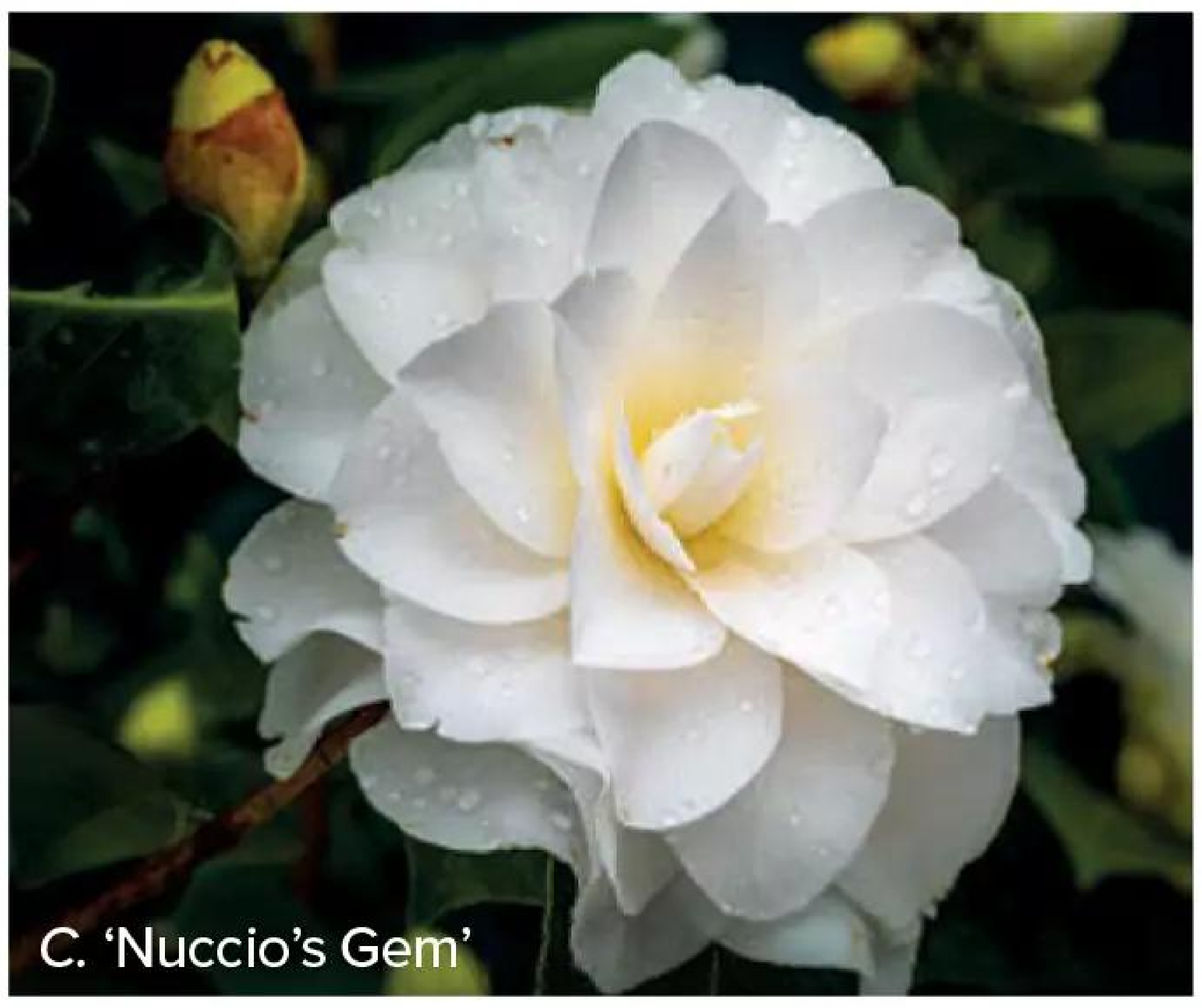

Camellia x williamsii ‘ Les Jury’

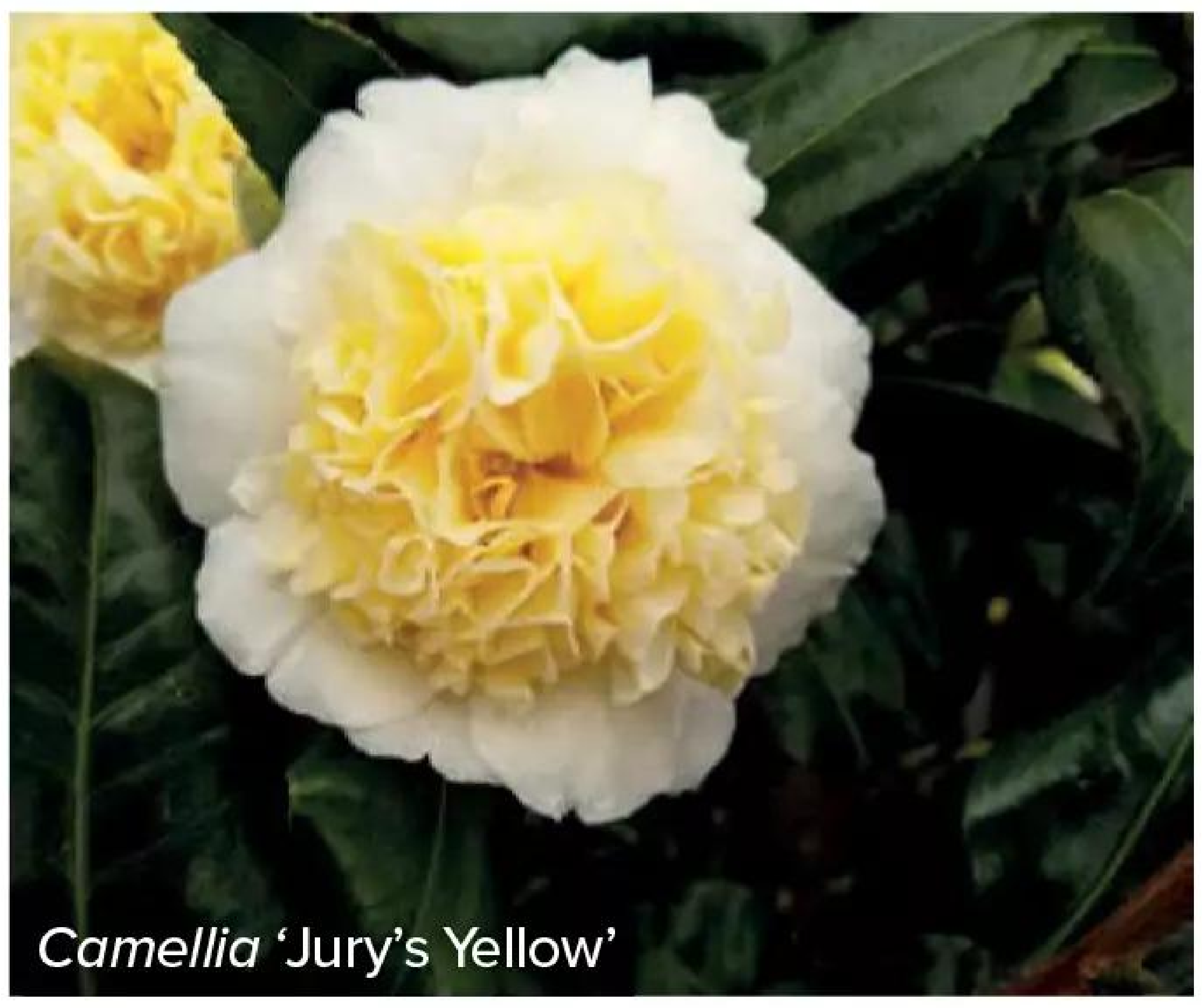

Camellia x willliamsii ‘Debbie’


Camellia sasanqua


Camellia x willliamsii ‘Alba Simplex’


Camellia x williamsii ‘Adolphe Audusson’


C. ‘Nuccio’s Gem’


Camellia ‘Jury’s Yellow’

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** Partial shade is needed to protect frozen flowers from the early morning sun, although *Camellia sasanqua* likes more sun and can grow in full sun once established. Protect from wind. Some varieties can be trained up walls.

✿ **Hardiness:** Tolerant of cold, wet winters, camellias can survive temperatures down to -15°C, although *C. sasanqua* is less hardy at -10°C and prefers to be sheltered by a wall or fence.

✿ **Planting:** Best done in autumn in warm soil. Camellias need acid soil, so plant in ericaceous compost in containers if you’re on chalk. Camellias must be adequately watered, particularly when they are young. If possible, use rainwater. Remember that camellias will not tolerate drought. If a plant dries out in summer, it will drop first its buds, then its leaves.

✿ **Deadheading:** When the flowers begin to fade, although this doesn’t promote more flowers, so can be left.

✿ **Pruning:** This is not really needed; if you must trim to shape, do so immediately after the flowers have fallen.

✿ **Propagation:** Take semi-ripe cuttings from mid to late summer. Remove a strip of bark from the base of the cutting and dip the end in rooting compound. Take hardwood cuttings (this year’s growth) in the same way but in autumn and late winter.

Feed in early spring with an ericaceous fertiliser. Do not feed after the end of July.

Pests and diseases

Chlorosis is probably the most common problem and is caused when the soil is too alkaline. There will be a yellowing of the leaves, often with brown patches. Treat plants with Miracid, or one of the other compounds available for ericaceous plants, which contain iron, manganese and certain other trace elements.

Viburnum

Viburnum

Plant: autumn/ early spring

Position: full sun/ partial shade

Hardiness: -15 to -25°C

Propagate: semi-ripe cuttings in summer

For winter flowers and fragrance, not to mention attractive leaves and berries, look at viburnums

Many viburnums have beautiful summer flowers, or gorgeous autumn colours. In total, there are well over 150 species and cultivars of viburnum, and around half are evergreen. But it's those with winter interest that deserve much more attention.

Viburnums range from compact shrubs suitable for small gardens to larger specimens that can be trained into small trees. Many varieties, such as *Viburnum tinus*, flower for extended periods, some for up to nine months of the year.

The genus includes popular varieties like *V. tinus* (Laurustinus). Like many Mediterranean plants it's a real survivor, tolerant not only of inhospitable conditions and poor soil, but surprisingly of the cold and wet of the British winter.

V. davidii (David viburnum) can make a large shrub but is at its best when still young, forming a compact mound of deep green, curiously veined leaves. If there is a male version of *V. davidii* within bee-flying distance (as a pollinator), female versions produce gorgeous winter berries that are described variously as blue-black and turquoise.

V. rhytidophyllum (wrinkled viburnum) has really bold foliage. Although growing to some 6½ft. (2m) in 10 years, in the right situation it can be allowed to grow into a small tree. Cream-coloured flower trusses appear in late spring.

Hybrid cultivars like *V. × burkwoodii* 'Anne Russell' and *V. × bodnantense* 'Charles Lamont' are prized for their fragrant winter blooms.

Did you know... The name 'Viburnum' is derived from the Latin word 'viere', meaning to tie, referring to the pliable branches of some species used for basket-making

Top tips

- Choose from spring, summer, autumn, or winter-flowering varieties to suit your garden's needs
- Most viburnums thrive in sun or partial shade and are adaptable to various soil types
- Regular pruning helps maintain shape and encourage better flowering
- Some varieties, like *V. davidii*, make excellent ground cover plants

Hybrid *V. × burkwoodii* ‘Anne Russell’

Viburnum bodnantense ‘Charles Lamont’

SHUTTERSTOCK

V. farreri

Viburnum tinus ‘Gwenllian’

SHUTTERSTOCK

Viburnum rhytidophyllum ‘Alleghany’

SHUTTERSTOCK

Viburnum lantana

SHUTTERSTOCK

Viburnum tinus ‘Eve Price’

SHUTTERSTOCK

Viburnum carlesii ‘Aurora’

SHUTTERSTOCK

Viburnum x bodnantense ‘Dawn’

SHUTTERSTOCK

GROWING ADVICE

- **Site and position:** Viburnums are adaptable and thrive in most garden soils. They prefer full sun to partial shade and can tolerate urban pollution and coastal environments. When planting, consider the eventual size of the shrub and its purpose in your garden design. Larger varieties like *V. rhytidophyllum* make excellent screening plants, while compact forms like *V. davidii* are perfect for modern or oriental-inspired gardens.
- **Planting:** Plant in spring or autumn. Prepare the soil by adding organic matter if needed. Water well after planting and mulch around the base.
- **Care**: Most viburnums are low-maintenance once established. Water during dry spells, especially in the first year. Apply a balanced fertiliser in spring to promote healthy growth and abundant flowering.
- **Pruning:** While not essential, pruning can help maintain size and shape. Deciduous: prune in spring to remove old growth and promote good flowering. Evergreen: prune after flowering to allow time for new growth to mature before the next flowering season. It’s better to remove a few branches entirely rather than cutting all branches back by half.

Pests & diseases

Viburnums are generally robust plants with few serious pest or disease issues. However, watch out for aphids, which can cause leaf curling, and whitefly, which may infest leaf undersides. These pests rarely cause significant damage. Prune out any affected areas and use organic pest control methods if necessary.

Hellebores

Helleborus sp.

Plant: autumn/
early spring

Position: partial
to full shade

Hardiness:
-15°C to -20°C

Propagate:
division in autumn

Easy-to-grow hellebores provide a burst of colour in winter and early spring

Hellebores are mainly hardy perennial, evergreen plants flowering in winter and spring. Their five-petalled flowers resemble those of buttercups but on a much larger scale, and in an extraordinary array of colours and colour combinations – literally from black, through the rainbow to white with only a genuine blue missing.

As well as simple, single, bowl-shaped flowers, some varieties carry fully double flowers with 20 or 30 petals and some varieties are anemone-centred – that is, with a cluster of short petals in the centre of each flower.

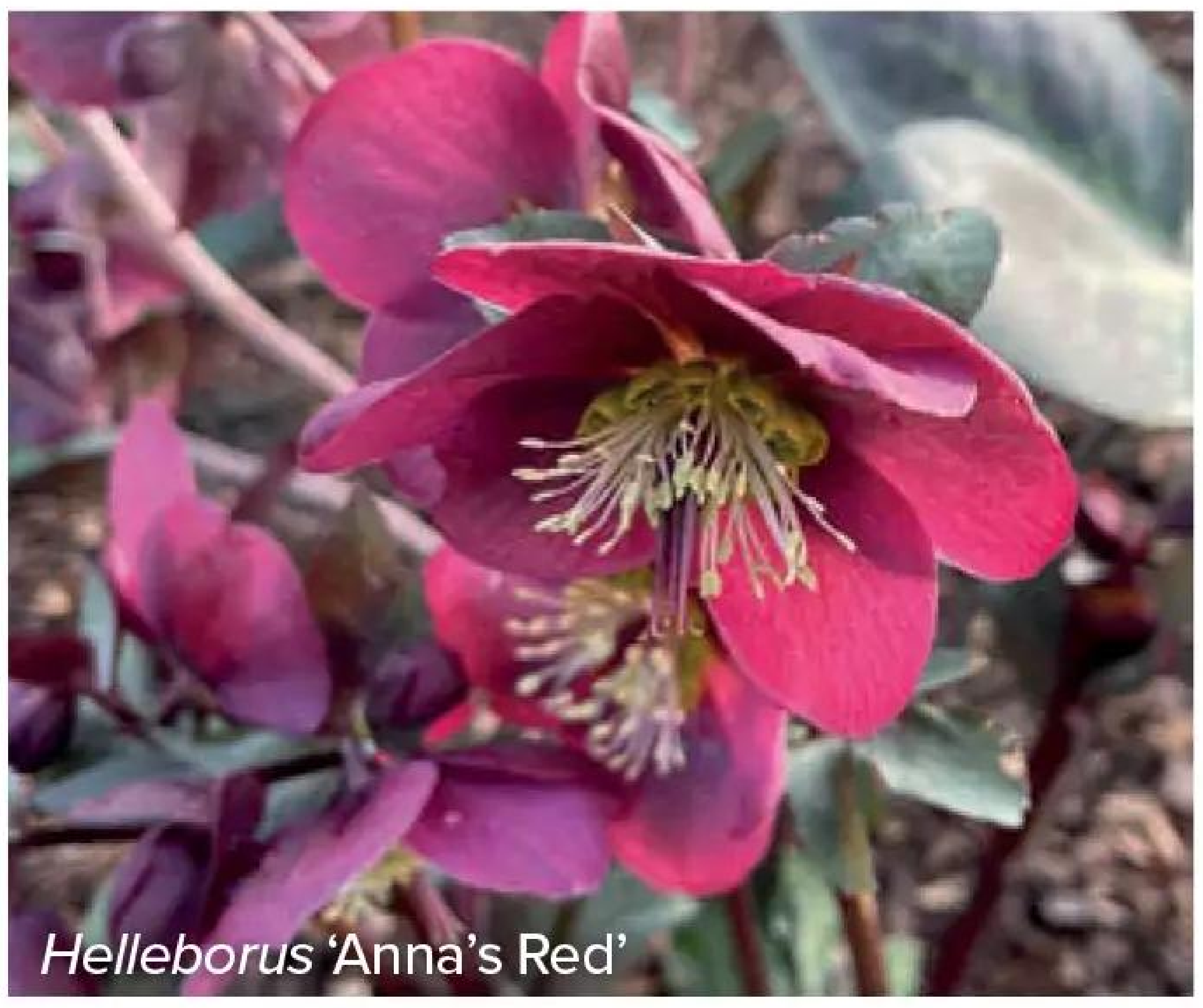
In most hellebores, the foliage and flowers arise from the crown of the plant on separate stems. The large, leathery, evergreen foliage is boldly divided into at least five and often seven or nine – or even more – leaflets creating a valuable, weed-suppressing ground cover.

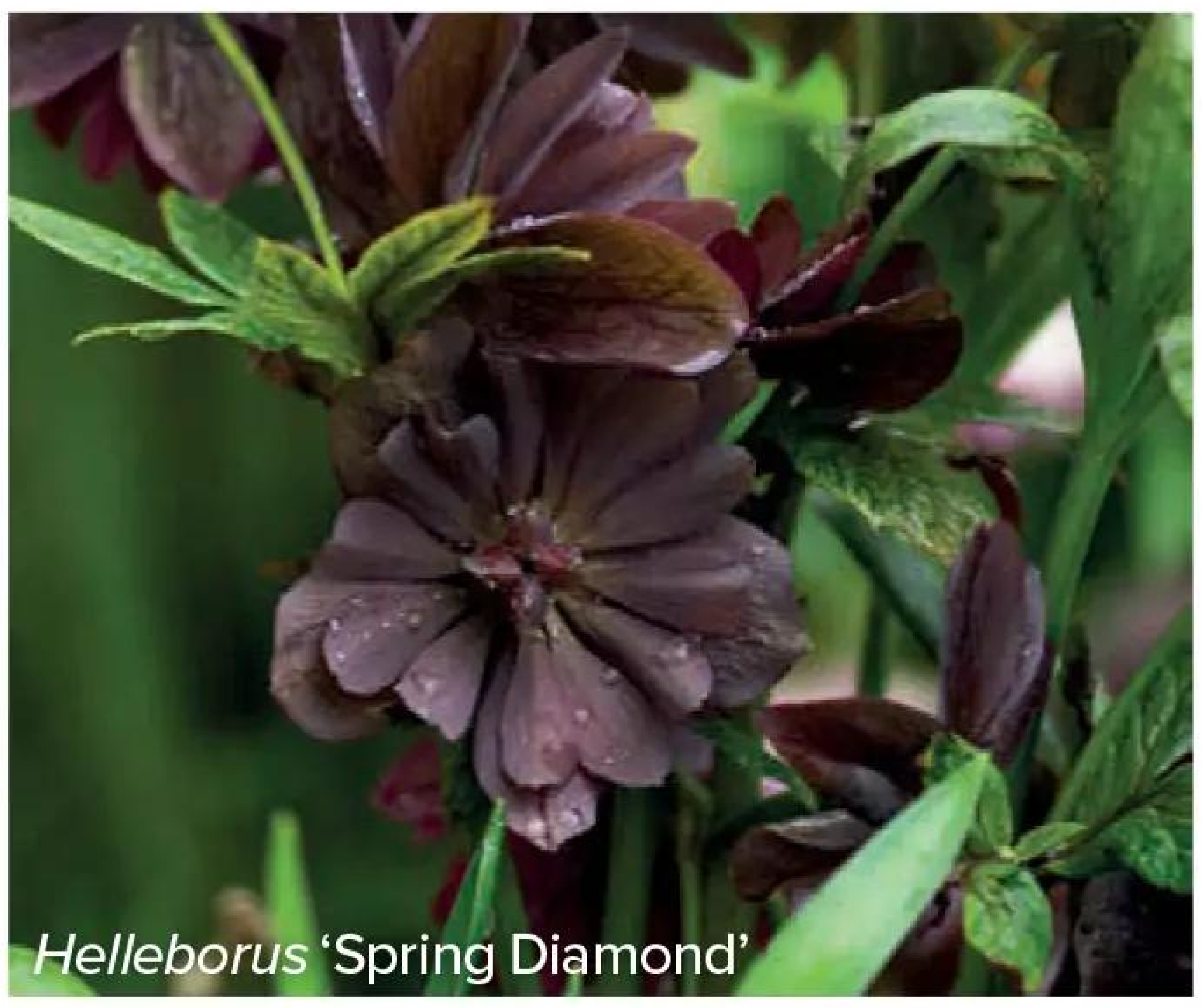
The flowers open one-by-one in heads of up to 30, but often fewer, and provide nectar for early pollinators. Hellebore flowers usually nod towards the ground, so you need to turn them up to see the surprising range of colours and colour patterns that hellebores bring.

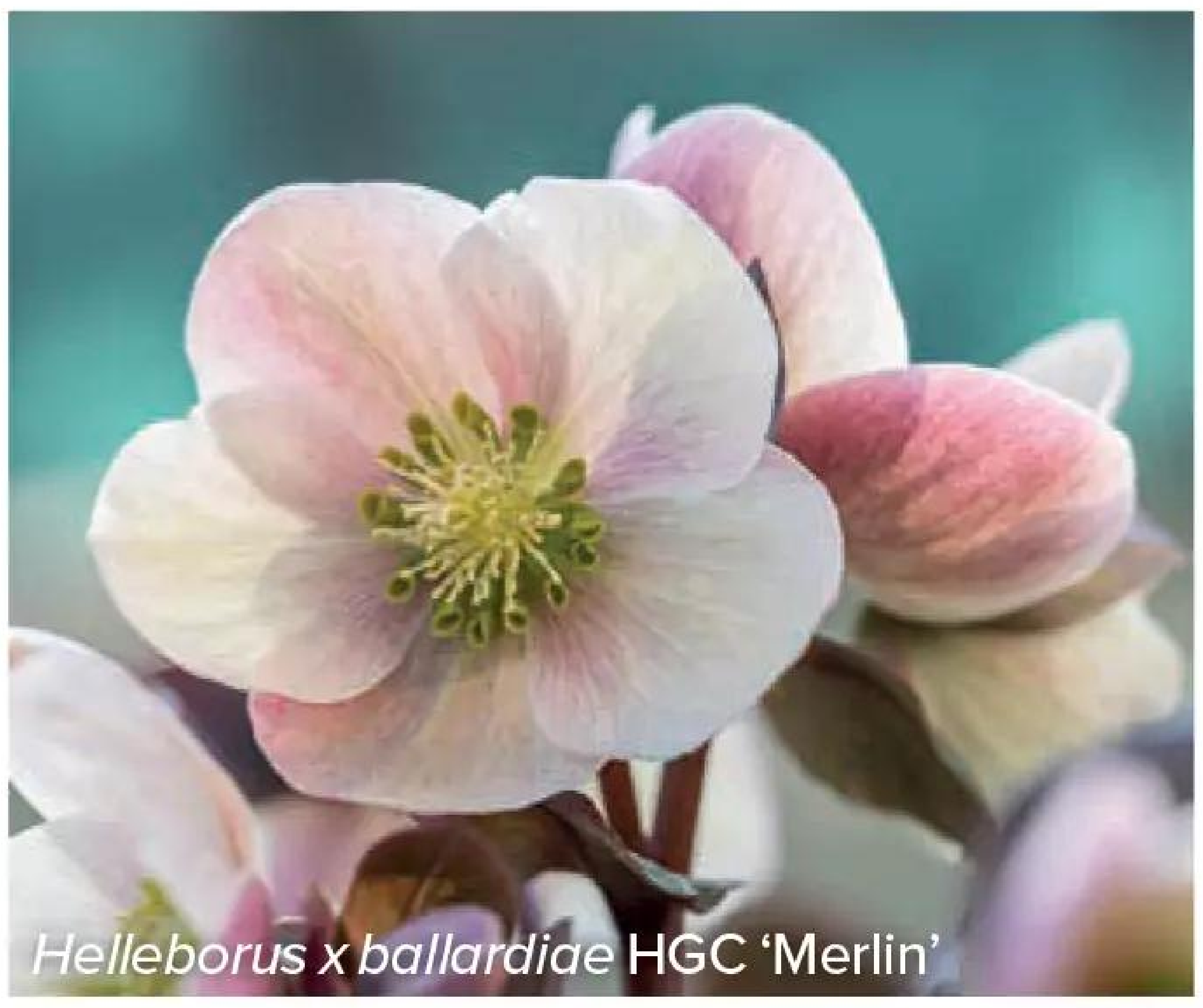
The name 'hellebore' comes from the Greek 'elein' meaning 'to injure' and 'bora' meaning 'food'. This refers to the plant's poisonous nature when ingested

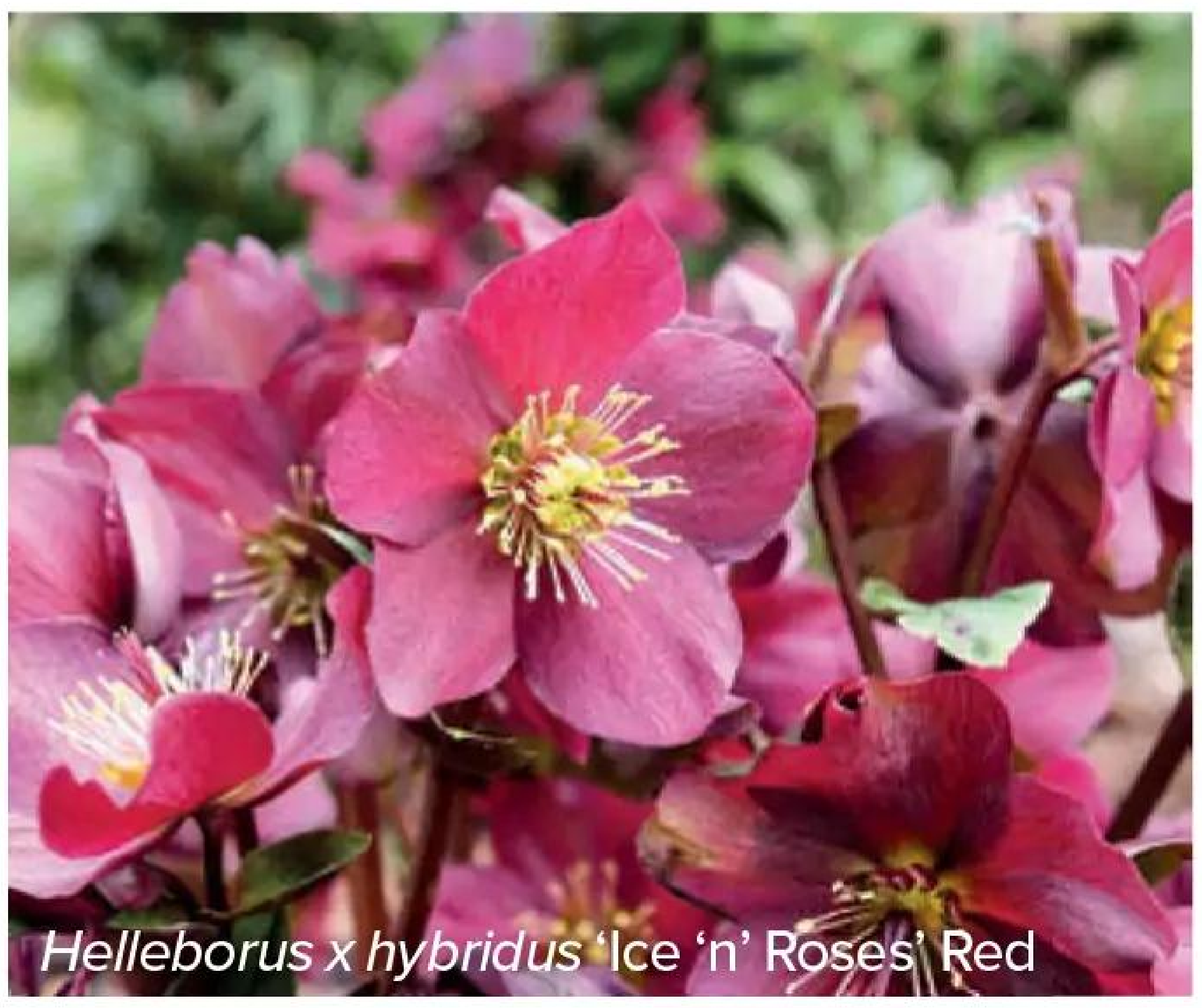
Top tips

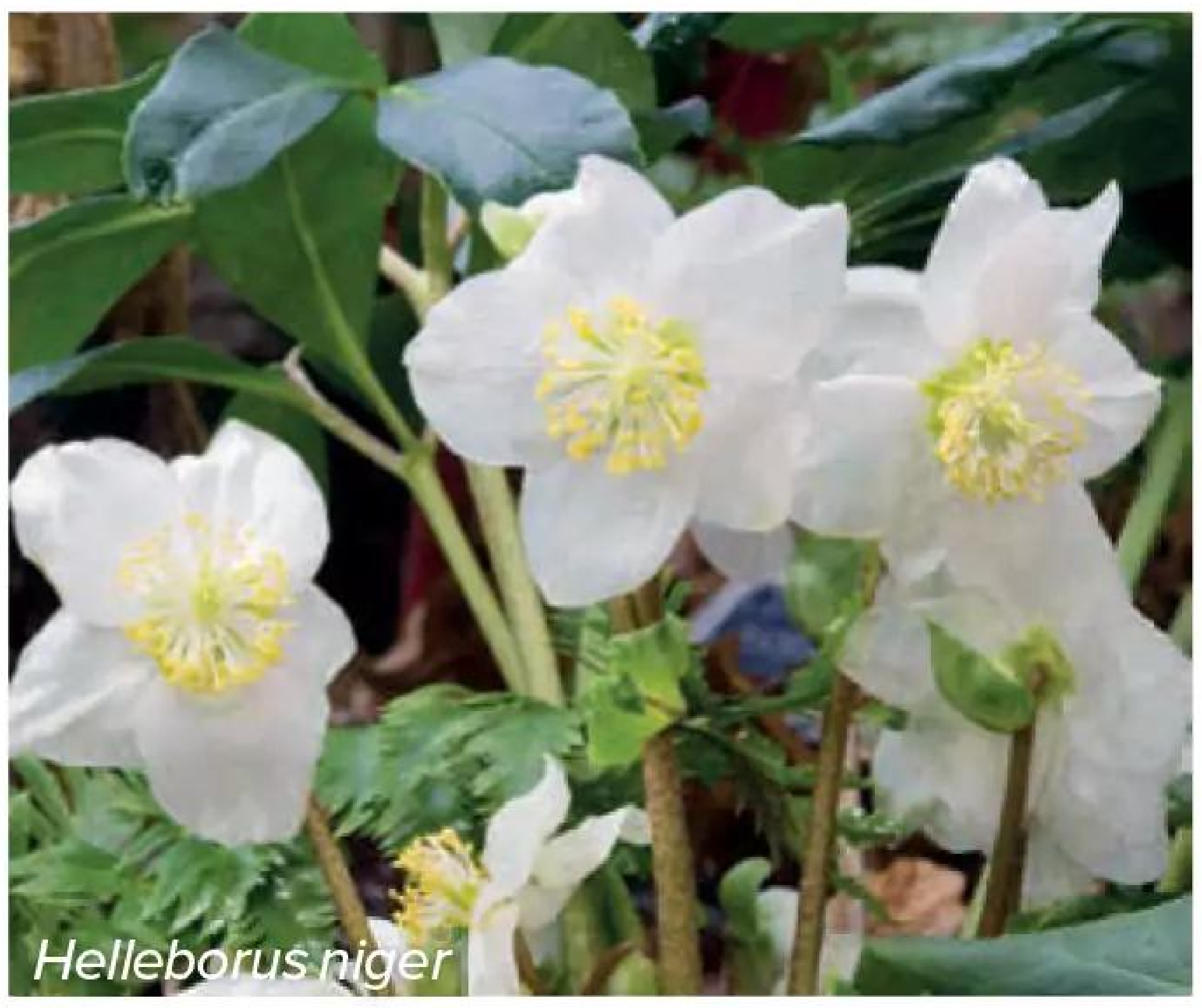
- Lenten roses, the most popular type to grow, enjoy a shady spot and flowers last for several weeks
- Cut off old leaves in autumn before flowering stems start to grow for better display

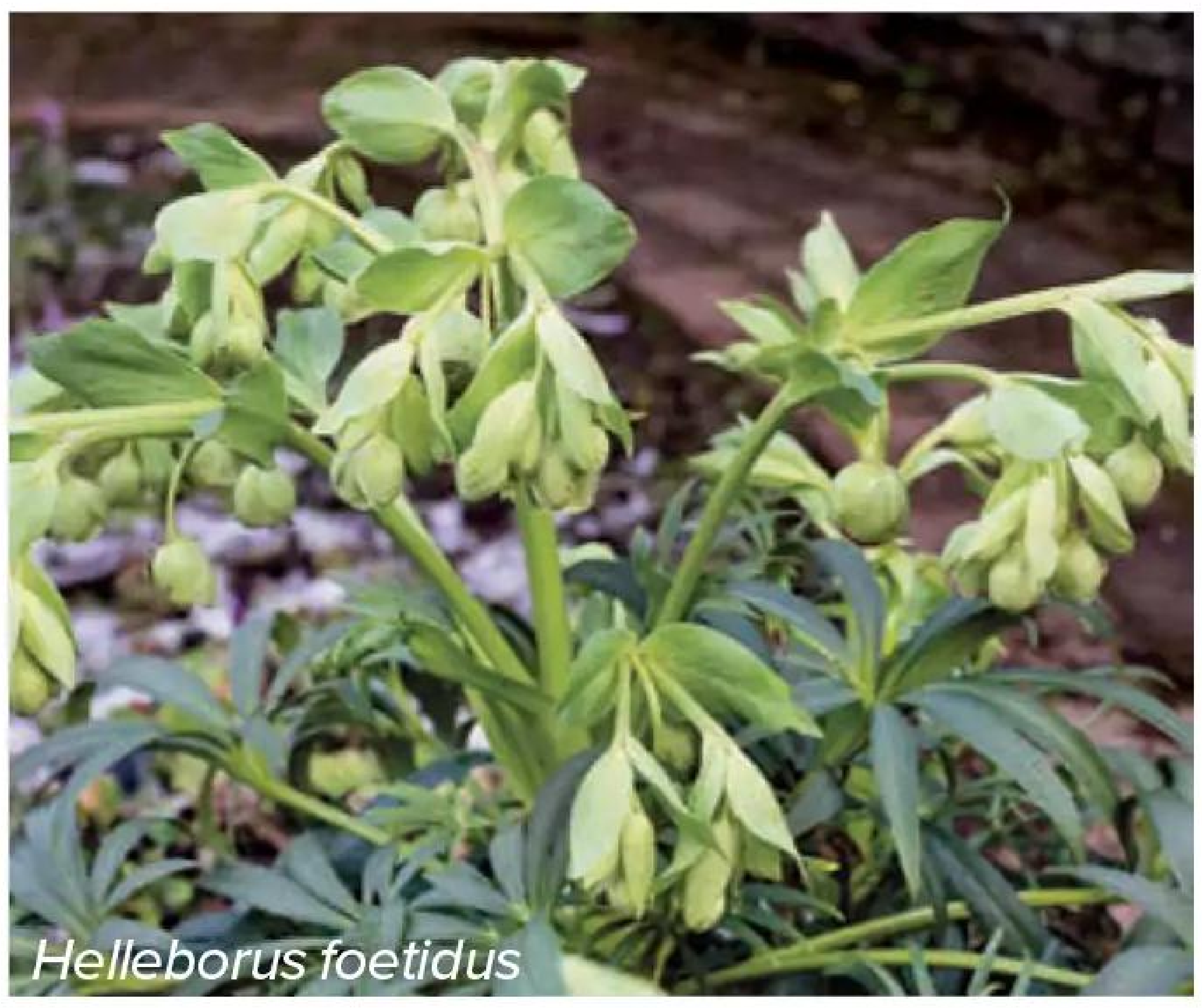

Helleborus 'Anna's Red'

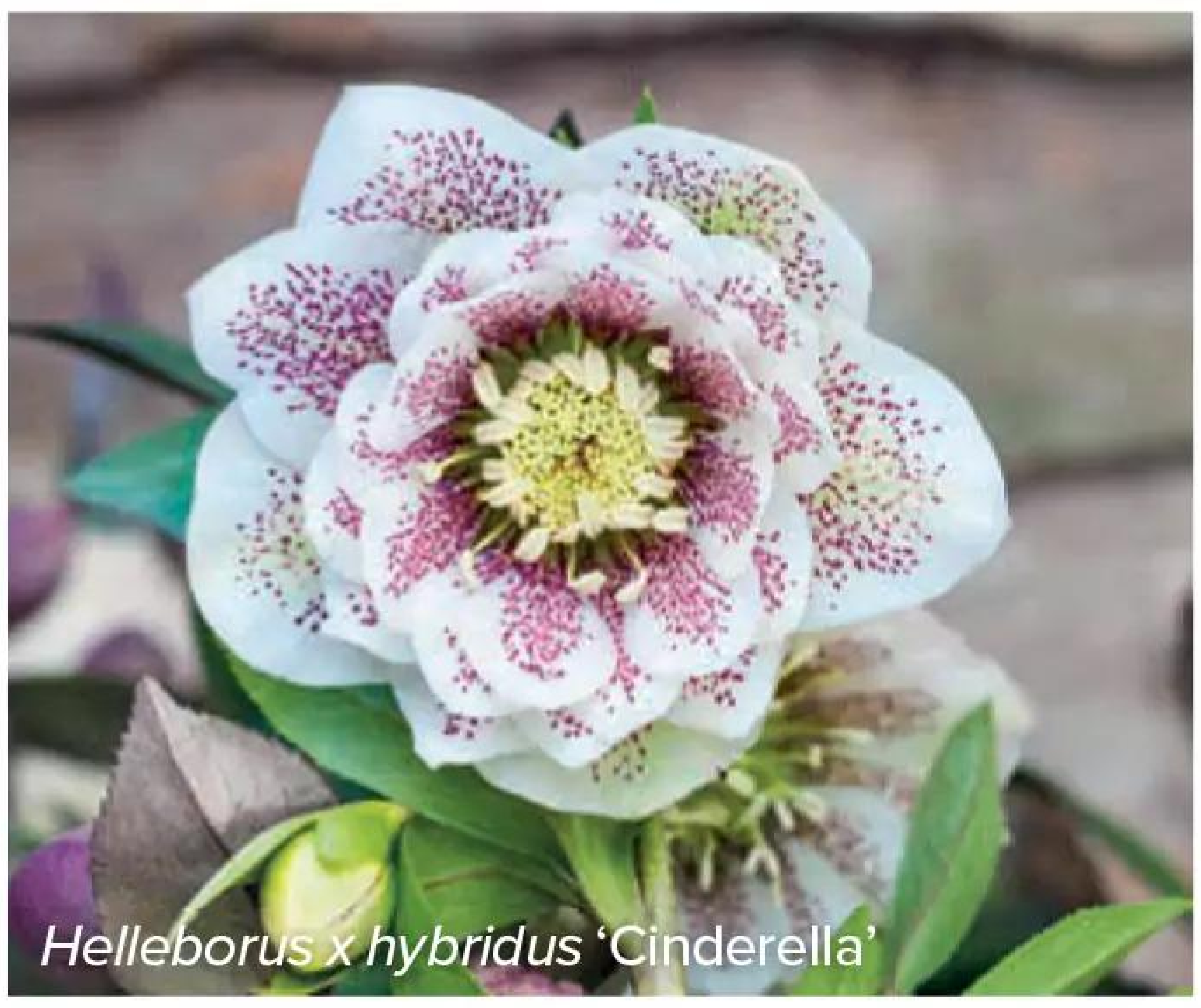

Helleborus 'Spring Diamond'

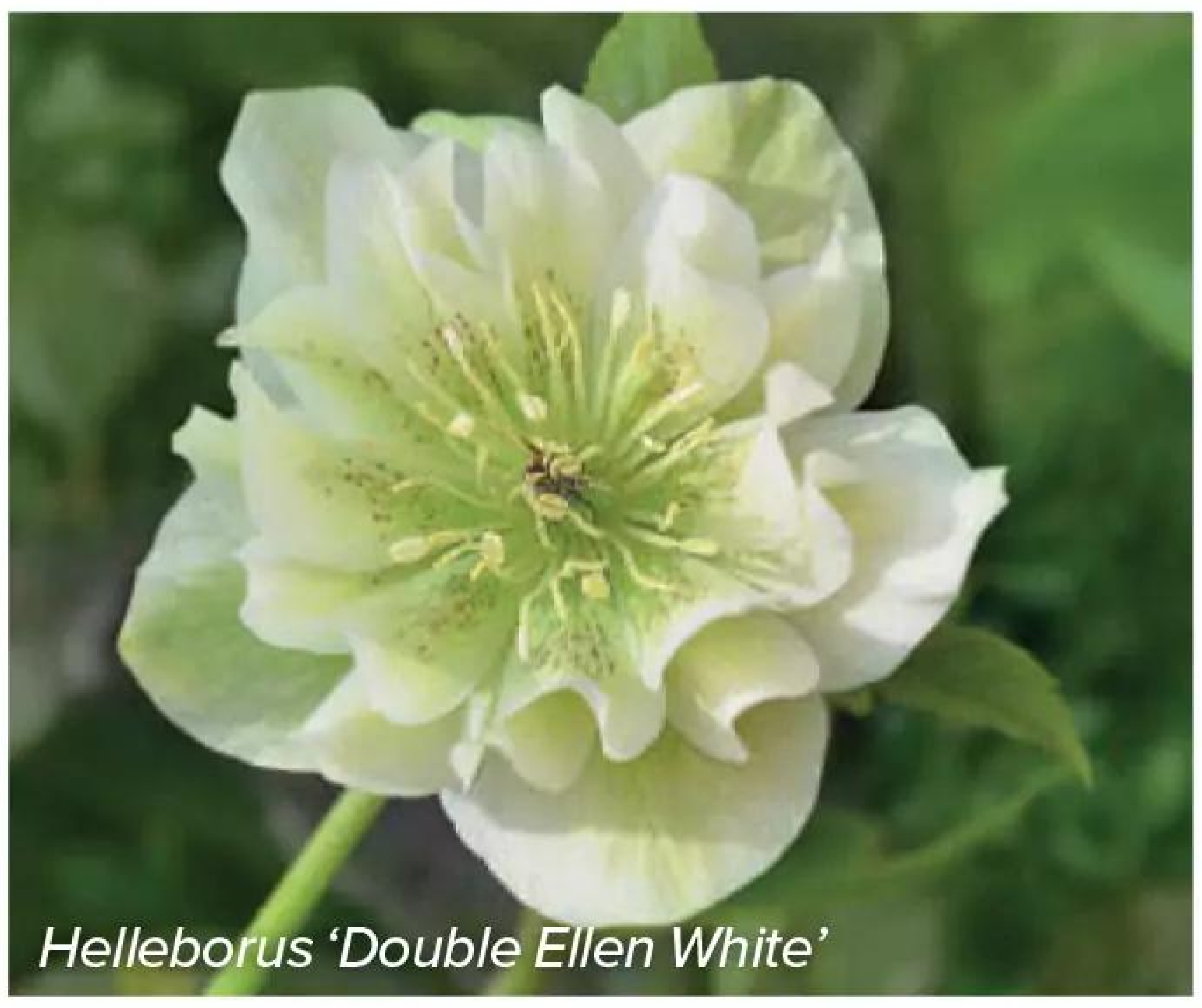

Helleborus x ballardiae HGC 'Merlin'

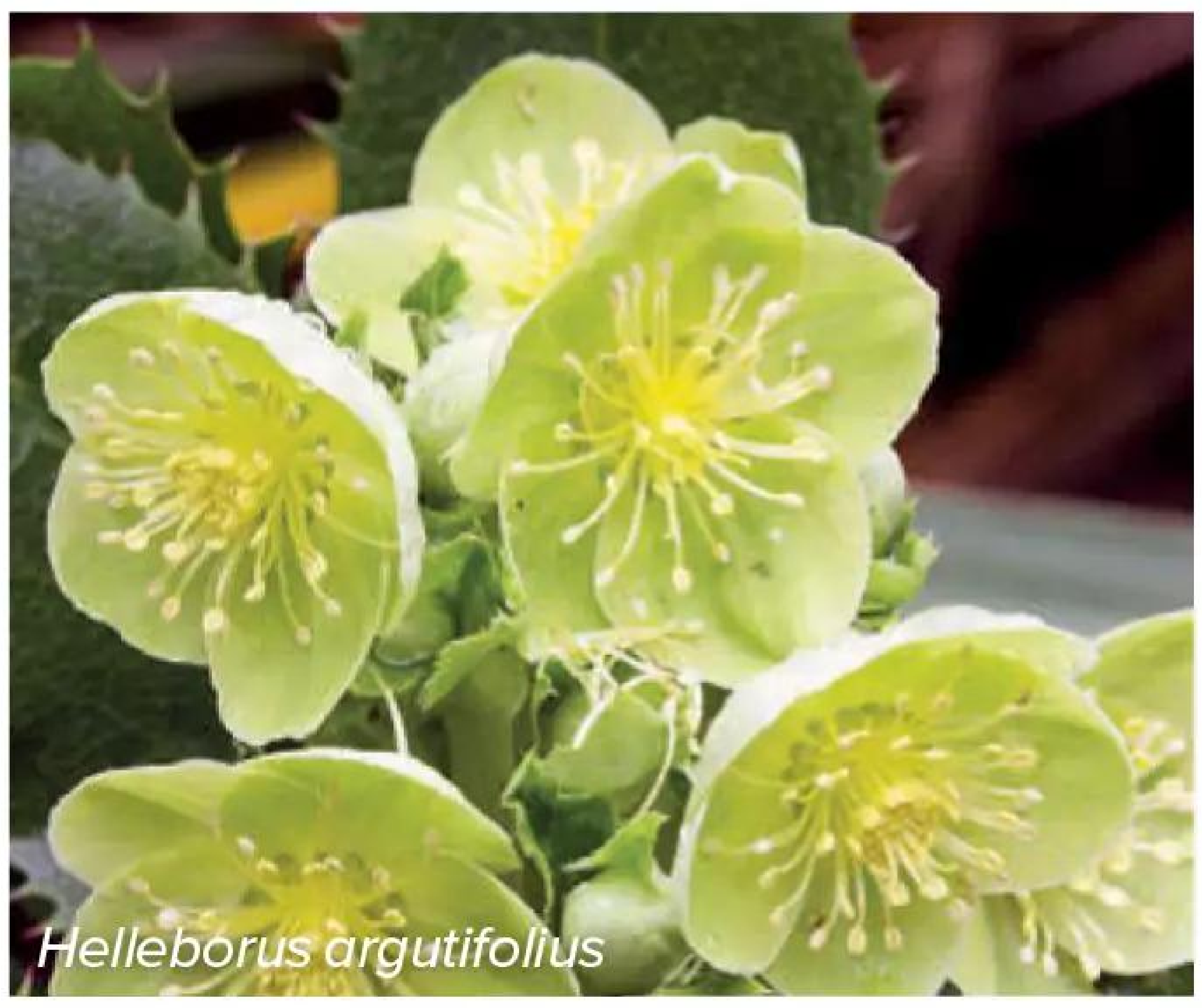

Helleborus x hybridus 'Ice 'n' Roses' Red


Helleborus niger


Helleborus foetidus


Helleborus x hybridus 'Cinderella'


Helleborus 'Double Ellen White'


Helleborus argutifolius

GROWING ADVICE

- **Site and position:** Most hellebores are shade lovers, but are remarkably tolerant of most conditions except waterlogging and long droughts. Lenten roses thrive in dappled shade or shade for part of the day.
- **Hardiness:** Most hellebores are very hardy, tolerating temperatures down to -15°C to -20°C.
- **Planting:** Best done in autumn or early spring. Hellebores appreciate thorough preparation. Dig a hole the depth of your spade, loosen the soil in the base of the hole and mix in plenty of organic matter, such as garden compost. Set the plant so that the crown is the same height as the surrounding soil.
- **Deadheading:** Remove faded flowers to prevent self-seeding if you want to maintain the characteristics of the parent plant.
- **Pruning:** Cut off old leaves in autumn before the flowering stems start to grow. This improves the appearance of the plant and helps prevent disease.
- **Propagation:** The best approach is to lift and divide the plants in autumn, and replant the pieces. Alternatively, if you leave the flowers to develop seeds, harvest them when they turn black and sow them at once. You should have flowering plants in three years – but there is no guarantee that the new plants will resemble their parent. Feed in early spring with a balanced fertiliser.

Pests & diseases

Hellebores are generally resistant to pests and diseases. However, they can occasionally suffer from leaf spot, a fungal disease that causes brown spots on the leaves. Remove and destroy affected leaves. Slugs and snails may also damage young growth. Use organic slug pellets or beer traps to control them.

Scent

Plant: varies by species

Position: varies (sun to shade)

Hardiness: varies by species

Propagate: varies (division, cuttings, seed)

Even in the depths of winter, there are plants that will flower, and some of those blooms are scented

Writing off winter as a time when the garden is put to bed ready to re-emerge in spring means missing out on some of the plant world's most intoxicating fragrances and eye-pleasing flowers. Many seasonal bloomers are accompanied by a delicious perfume that's especially apparent on those glorious days when the distant sun emerges from the clouds. And it's often the case that humans aren't the only beings drawn outside to bask in the warming rays, with beneficial insects grateful to forage these flowers when little else is available.

There's no escaping the fact that winter is more often than not a mushy and messy time of the year, which is why many gardeners plant their fragrant shrubs and bulbs close to pathways, doors and windows so that they can easily catch their scent and keep their feet dry too.

Winter-scented plants for flowers

In late winter or early spring, and sometimes through into early summer, the flower stems of many fragrant plants emerge. The flowers often unfurl with delightful scents, ranging from sweet vanilla to spicy clove-like fragrances. Varieties with intense fragrances are

Top tips

- Plant fragrant shrubs and bulbs close to pathways, doors, and windows for easy enjoyment
- Protect less hardy species by planting them against south or west-facing walls
- Consider growing compact fragrant shrubs in pots for flexibility in placement

particularly prized for their ability to perfume the winter garden.

The flowers usually stand out against bare branches or evergreen foliage and provide valuable early nectar for bees and other pollinators.

Winter-scented plants for foliage

While flowers are the main source of fragrance, some plants, such as *Daphne odora* and *Chimonanthus praecox* offer scented foliage as well. Evergreen shrubs like *Sarcococca*, *Eucalyptus gunnii* and rosemary provide year-round structure and a backdrop for other plants. These plants often make dense, attractive cover and can be effective in suppressing weeds. Many retain their leaves through winter, providing ongoing interest.

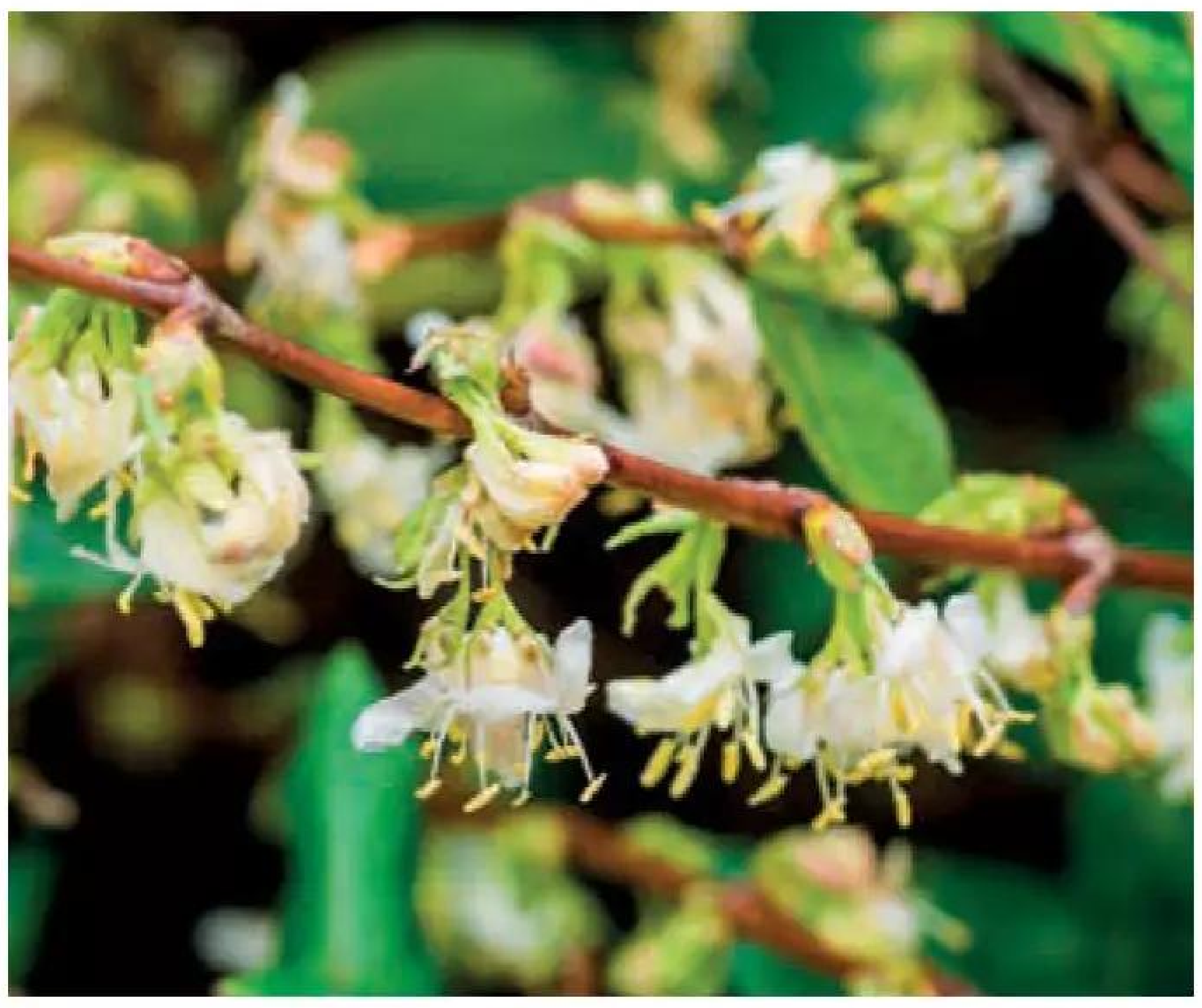
Diseases

Winter-flowering plants are generally robust, but can occasionally suffer from fungal diseases in damp conditions. Ensure good air circulation and avoid overhead watering.

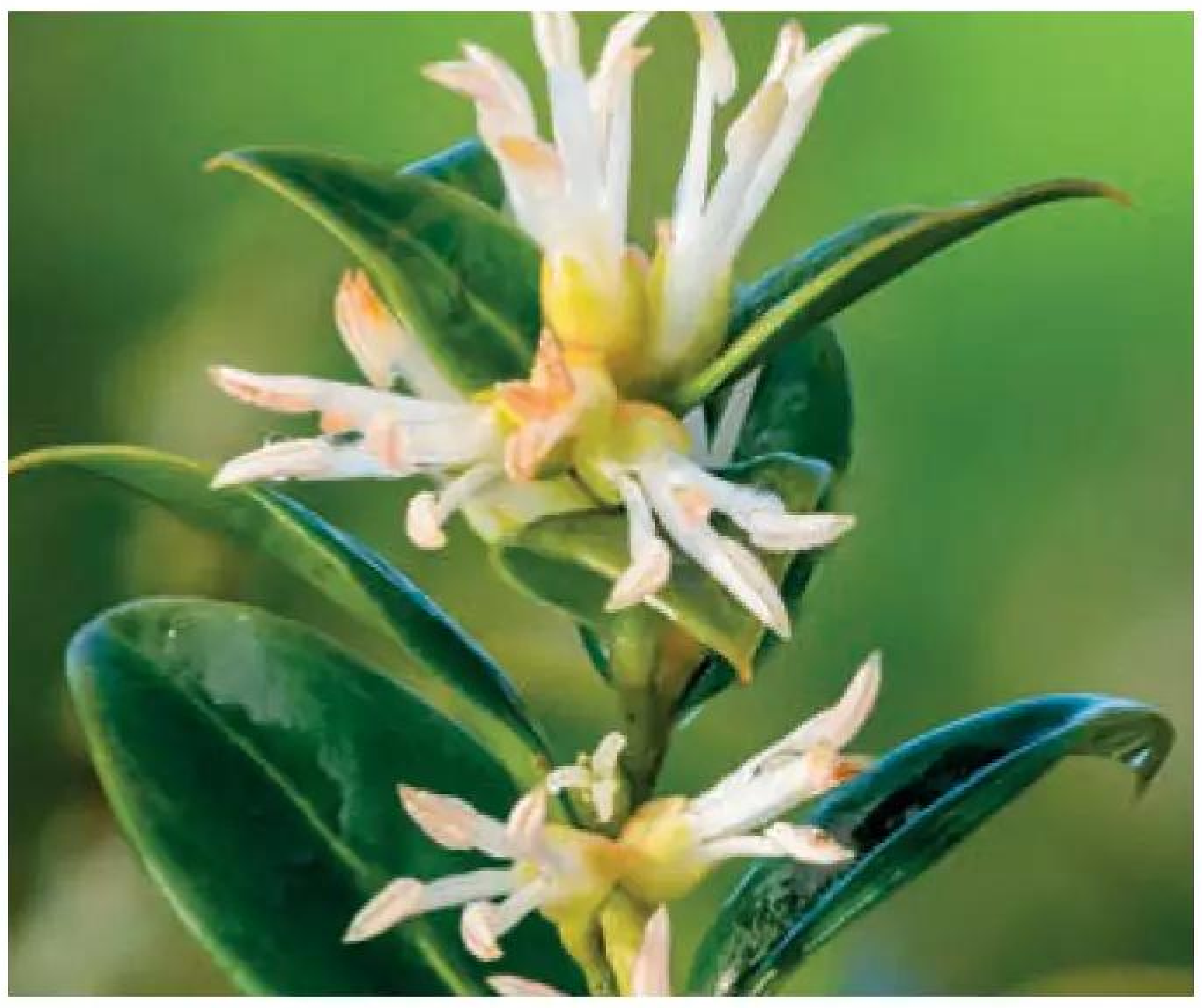
GROWING ADVICE

- **Position:** Varies by species. Many winter-flowering plants prefer full sun or light shade, but some thrive in partial or full shade.
- **Soil:** Most prefer well-drained soil, but moisture requirements vary. Some, like *Sarcococca*, tolerate both dry and damp conditions.
- **Propagation**: Methods vary by species. Many shrubs can be propagated by cuttings, while bulbs often produce offsets.
- **Care:** Protect less hardy species from harsh winds. Water during dry spells, especially for container-grown plants.
- **Deadheading:** Generally not necessary for most winter-flowering shrubs, but can be done to tidy appearance.

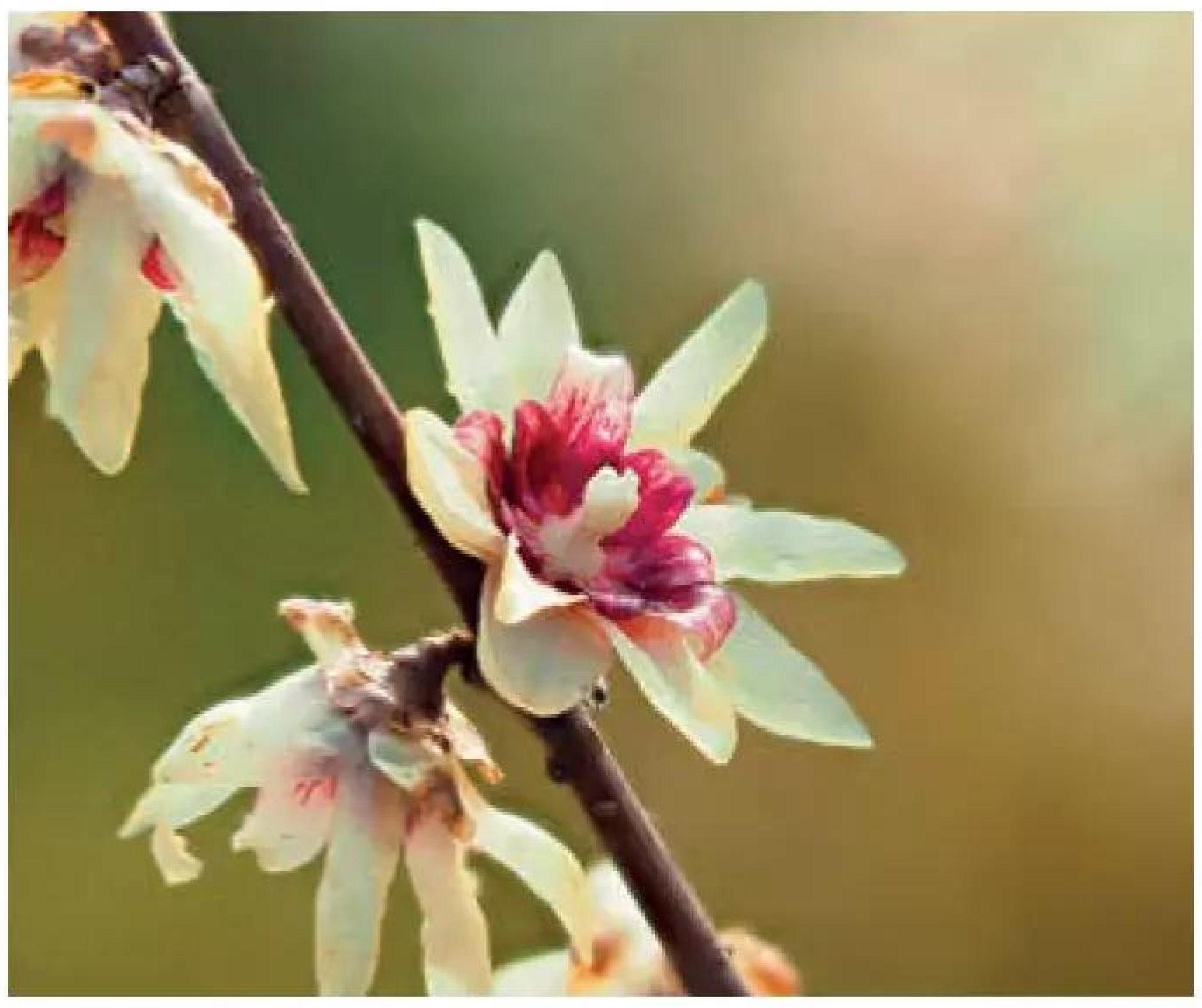
3 SHRUBS



***Lonicera fragrantissima* (Winter honeysuckle)**
Deciduous or semi-evergreen shrub with creamy flowers on almost leafless branches. Great for wildlife. **Special feature:** Familiar honeysuckle scent in winter. **Good for:** Informal hedging or back of border. **Grow with:** Winter-flowering hellebores. **Height:** Up to 2m (6.6ft).



***Sarcococca confusa* (Sweet box)**
Evergreen shrub with creamy-white flowers and a divine vanilla fragrance. Useful year-round structure. **Special feature:** Intense vanilla scent. **Good for:** Shade gardens and containers.**Grow with:** Snowdrops and winter aconites. **Height:** Around 1m (3ft).



***Chimonanthus praecox* (Wintersweet)**
Deciduous shrub with sulphur-yellow blooms on bare branches. Spicy, sweet fragrance. **Special feature:** Long-lasting cut flowers. **Good for:** Sunny borders. **Grow with:** Winter-flowering clematis. **Height:** 4m (13ft).

Did you know... Many winter-flowering plants have evolved strong fragrances to attract the few pollinators active in cold weather. This adaptation ensures successful reproduction even in challenging conditions

6 SCENTED OPTIONS

***Hamamelis x intermedia* (Witch hazel)**
Spider-like flowers in yellow, orange, or red on bare branches. Sweet scent and autumn colour. **Good for:** Winter structure and fragrance. **Grow with:** Hellebores and snowdrops. **Height:** More than 2.5m (8ft).

Mahonia x media
Evergreen shrub with sprays of yellow flowers and a lily-of-the-valley fragrance. Berries follow flowers. **Good for:** Shade gardens and winter interest. **Grow with:** Cyclamen and ferns. **Height:** More than 1 metre (3ft).

***Daphne mezereum* (*D. odora*)**
Intensely fragrant pale pink blooms. Compact and slow-growing, ideal for smaller gardens. **Good for:** Containers and near seating areas. **Grow with:** Early-flowering bulbs. **Height:** Varies, typically 1-1.5m (3-5ft).

***Iris unguicularis* (Algerian iris)**
Rich blue flowers with a primrose-like scent. Blooms from November to February. **Good for:** Sunny walls and borders. **Grow with:** Winter-flowering heathers. **Height:** 30cm (1ft).

***Galanthus* 'S. Arnott' (Snowdrop)**
Large white flowers with honey-sweet fragrance. Reliable and vigorous. **Good for:** Naturalising in lawns or under deciduous trees. **Grow with:** Winter aconites. **Height:** 15cm (6 ins).

***Crocus chrysanthus* 'Cream Beauty'**
Creamy-yellow flowers with purple margins and orange stamens. Sweet fragrance. **Good for:** Rock gardens and containers. **Grow with:** Early daffodils. **Height:** 8cm to 10cm (3" to 4").

Wildlife value

- Early flowers provide valuable nectar for bees and other pollinators
- Berries on some species offer food for birds
- Dense evergreen foliage provides shelter for small wildlife

Cyclamen

Cyclamen

Plant: late summer or autumn

Position: partial to full shade

Hardiness: varies by species (some to -20°C)

Propagate: seeds or division

They may be small, but cyclamen really pack a punch of much-needed colour

Every garden needs pockets of winter cheer and color, and cyclamen are low-maintenance perennials that thrive in shady spots and provide carpets of color for many months. They surprise us with intensely coloured flowers as we move into autumn, delight us with carpets of intricate foliage patterns, and then give us more brilliant flowers in deepest midwinter.

There are 23 botanical species offering flowers and foliage interest spanning many months. These include the hardy types *Cyclamen hederifolium* with its autumn flowers and *Cyclamen coum* that flowers in winter and early spring. There is also *Cyclamen persicum*, the source of the larger, blousier floristry types for indoor growing.

Each flower lasts for several weeks. Their petals are often reflexed (bent backwards), rising on slender stems above attractively patterned, heart-shaped leaves that form a rosette at the base of the plant.

Cyclamen can flower from autumn through to spring, depending on the species. If you plant different varieties, you can have cyclamen blooming at different times, giving you a longer window for flowering.

They are also prolific self-seeders, so expect more plants to crop up in future years. Many hardy cyclamen are woodland dwellers and need well-drained soil with plenty of leaf mold and shade in summer.

Cyclamen coum Pewter Group AGM

Cyclamen pseudibericum AGM

GETTY

Cyclamen hederifolium var. *hederifolium f. albiflorum* AGM

GROWING ADVICE

- **Site and position:** Partial to full shade, well-drained soil rich in organic matter
- **Hardiness:** Varies by species. Some, like *C. coum*, can tolerate temperatures down to -20°C
- **Planting:** Plant corms in late summer and autumn, 2in (5cm) deep in well-drained soil under trees and shrubs. The top of the corm should be just below the soil surface.
- **Propagation:** Cyclamen will liberally self-seed. You can also collect and sow seeds when ripe, or divide established clumps after flowering.

Top tip

- Cyclamen thrive in dry shade, making them perfect for planting under trees
- Plant in partial to full shade for best performance
- Great for winter interest and ground cover in woodland gardens

Heather

Ericaceae

Plant: spring or autumn

Position: full sun

Hardiness: varies (most are very cold hardy)

Propagate: layering or mounding

These small, sun-loving, evergreen shrubs provide a colourful display

Ericas are small, twiggy, evergreen, sun-loving, mostly lime-hating flowering shrubs. The short, needle-like leaves are usually dark green, though some varieties have leaves in other colours, and are carried on neat and bushy plants. The flowers are like tiny bells clustered towards the tops of the stems. The chocolate coloured, pollen-bearing anthers often peep out from inside the flowers creating a pretty two-tone effect.

There are more than 800 different species of ericas, growing wild in Europe, Asia and Africa. Although only a small proportion are grown in gardens, many of the most popular varieties also bring the benefit of coloured foliage that adds to the display. Most of the familiar varieties are very cold hardy.

Ericas grow wild in well-drained, often sandy, soils and replicating these conditions works well in gardens. They dislike clay soils and wet soils but often do well in containers.

Ericas for foliage

Erica leaves are typically short and needle-like, usually dark green, though some varieties have leaves in other colours. These plants make a dense, weed-suppressing carpet and

provide year-round structure in the garden.

Although the foliage remains evergreen, some varieties change colour with the seasons, adding extra interest to the garden.

Diseases

Ericas are generally disease-resistant but can suffer in poorly-drained soils. Ensure good air circulation to prevent fungal issues.

Wildlife value

- Flowers provide valuable nectar for early pollinators
- Dense foliage offers shelter for small wildlife
- Seeds can be food for birds

Heather honey is a rich amber colour, has a distinct flavour and a thick, almost gel-like consistency

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Position:** Grow in full sun. Most ericas prefer at least 6 hours of direct sunlight daily.

✿ **Soil:** Well-drained, sandy or acidic soil. Avoid clay or waterlogged soils. Poor soils can be made more suitable for ericas by spreading 2in (5cm) of composted bark or soil improver suitable for acid-loving plants and then using your fork to work it into the soil.

✿ **Propagation:** Propagate by layering low-growing shoots or by mounding with ericaceous compost.

✿ **Care:** Water newly planted ericas during dry spells, but avoid overwatering. Apply ericaceous fertiliser in spring if growth is slow.

✿ **Pruning:** Prune immediately after flowering. Don't cut into old growth at the base of plants.

SUMMER/AUTUMN FLOWERS

SHUTTERSTOCK

***Erica cinerea* 'Lady Skelton'**
Summer-flowering variety with bright magenta-pink flowers and lime-green foliage. **Special feature:** Vibrant flower colour. **Good for:** Summer accent and pollinator attraction. **Grow with:** Purple-flowered heathers for contrast. **Height**: 10in (25cm).

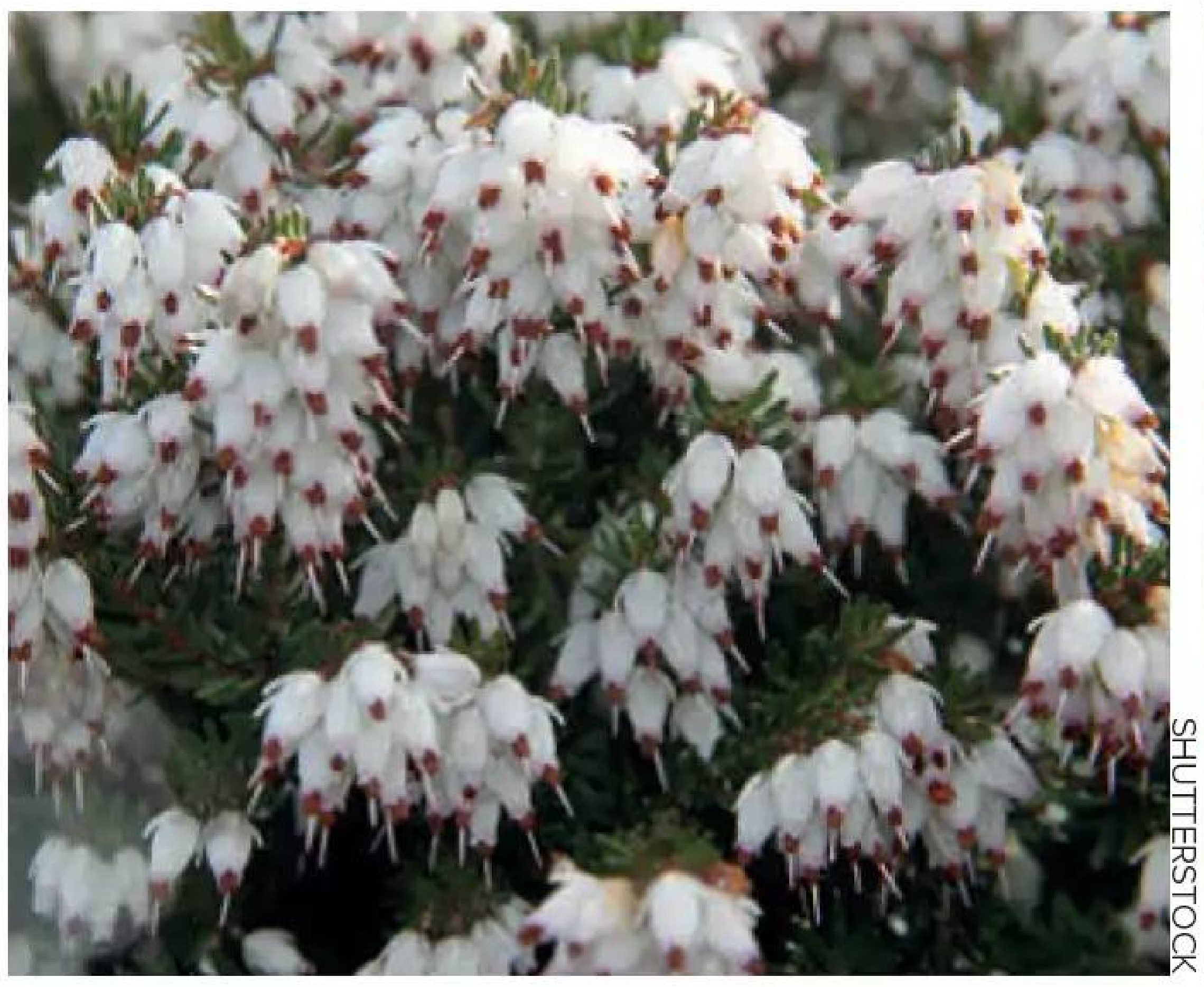
SHUTTERSTOCK

***Erica vagans* (Cornish heath)**
Dark foliage with long dense sprays of flowers in pink shades and white. Summer and autumn bloomer. **Good for:** Coastal gardens. **Grow with:** Grasses and late-summer perennials. **Height:** 1-2ft (30-60cm).

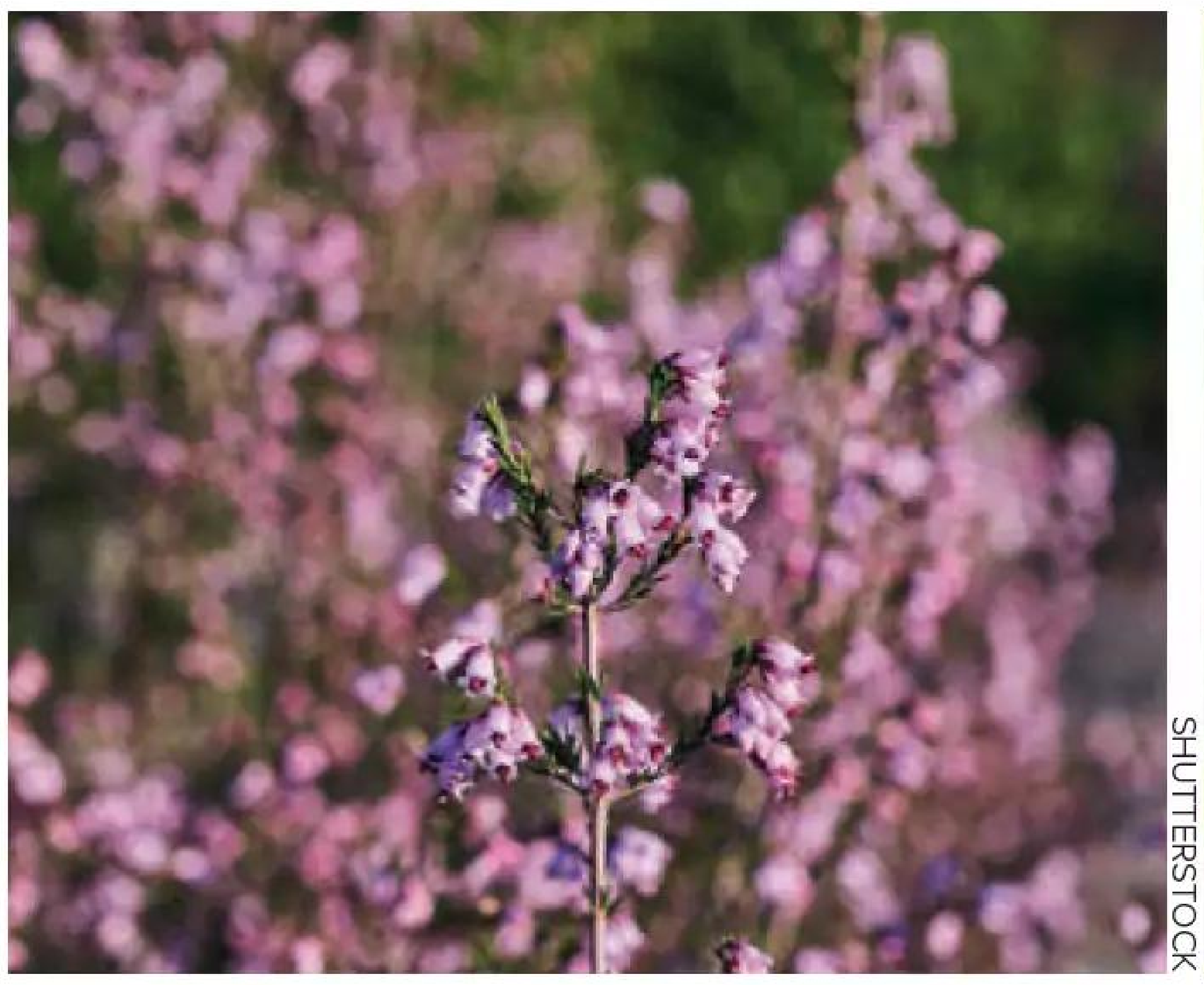
***Erica cinerea* 'Summer Gold'**
Summer-flowering variety with magenta flowers and bright golden foliage. **Special feature:** Colourful foliage. **Good for:** Year-round interest. **Grow with:** Other summer-flowering heaths. **Height:** 12in (30cm).

Did you know...

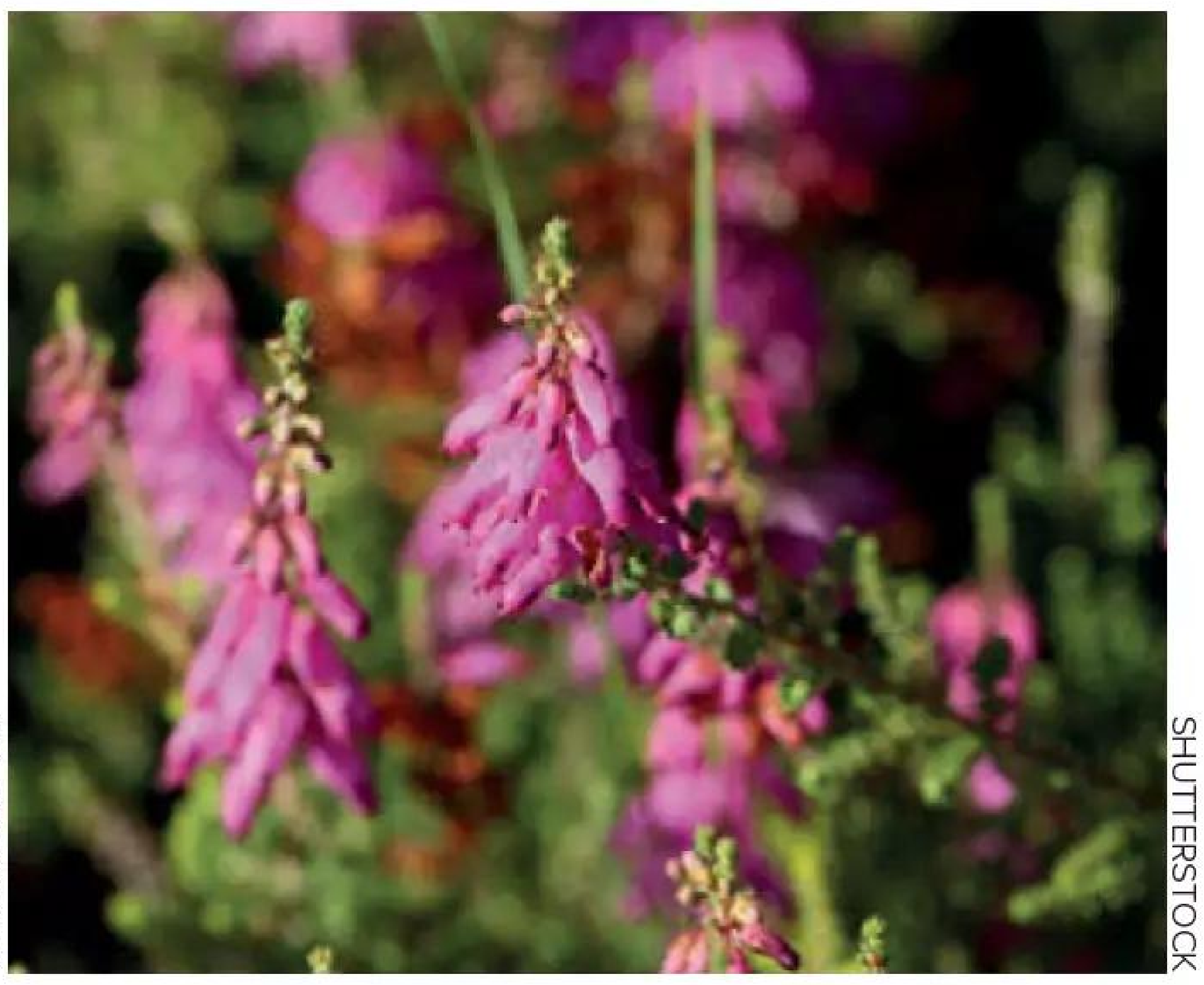
The name 'erica' comes from the Greek word 'ereike', meaning 'to break', as the stems were once used to make brooms. Ericas have been cultivated for centuries and have played significant roles in folklore and traditional medicine in various cultures


SHUTTERSTOCK

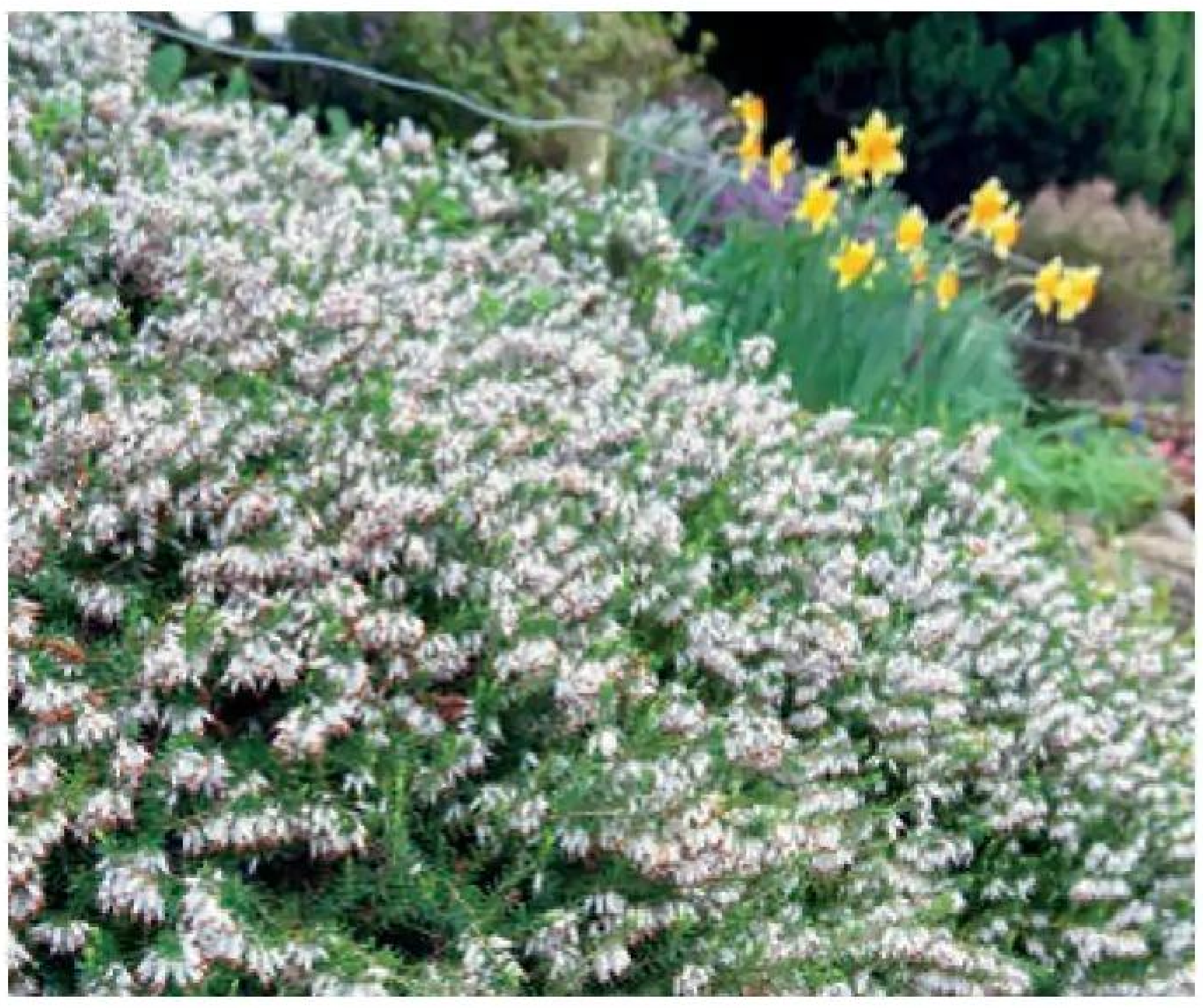
***Erica arborea* (Tree heath)**
Tall, fairly hardy species with golden foliage and early spring flowers. **Good for:** Background planting. **Grow with:** Rhododendrons and azaleas. **Height:** Can reach 6-10ft (2-3m) or more.


SHUTTERSTOCK

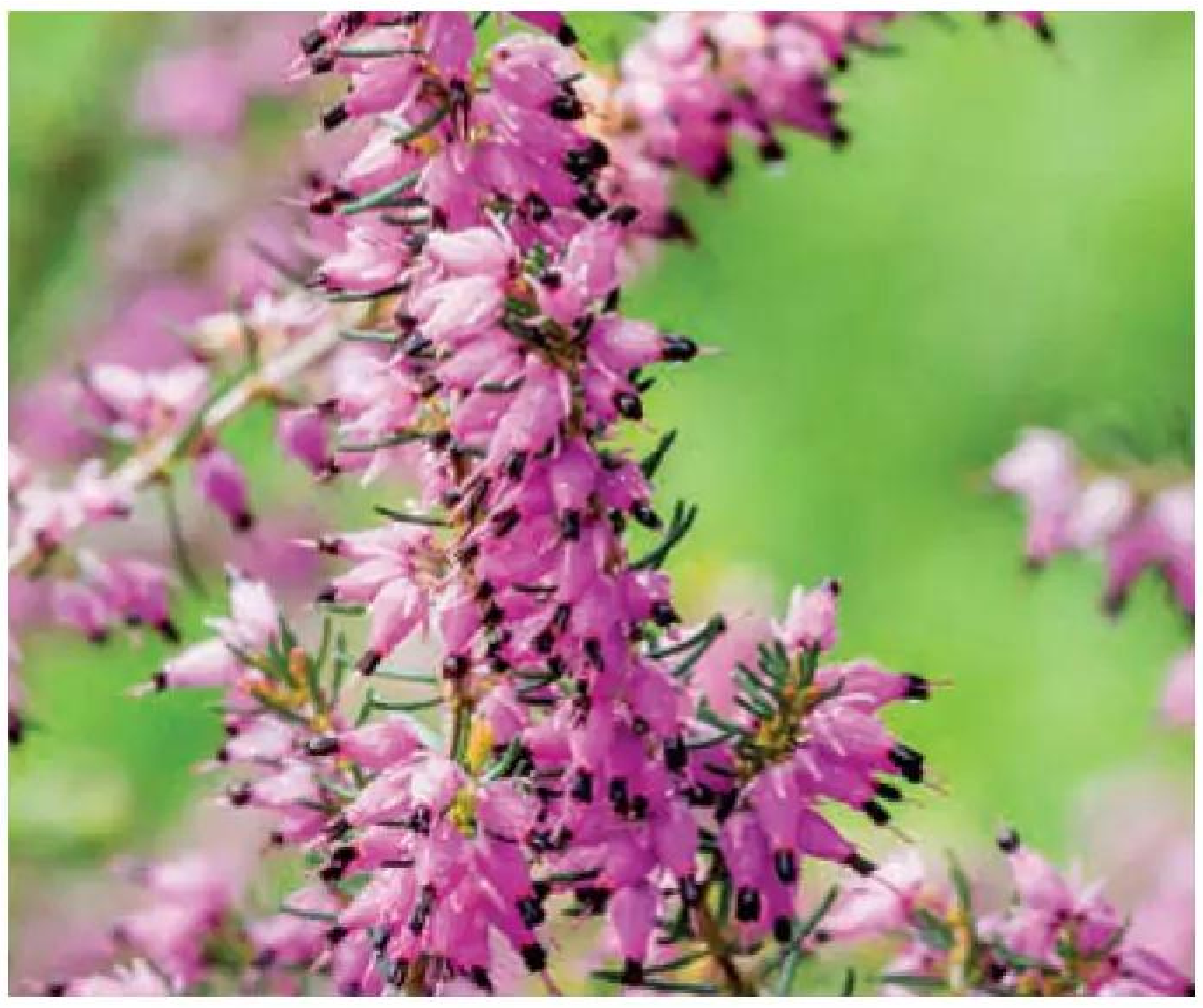
***Erica erigena* (Irish heath)**
Taller than E. carnea but less frost hardy. Late winter and spring flowers. **Good for:** Mild climate gardens. **Grow with:** Spring-flowering bulbs. **Height:** 1.5-2ft (45-60cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

***Erica ciliaris* (Dorset heath)**
Low, spreading species with flowers in red, pink or white. Summer to mid-autumn bloomer. **Good for:** Ground cover. **Grow with:** Late-summer perennials. **Height:** 6-12in (15-30cm).



***Erica carnea* 'Springwood White'**
Winter-flowering variety with abundant pure white flowers and dark green foliage. **Special feature:** Early bloomer. **Good for:** Winter colour and ground cover. **Grow with:** Colourful winter heathers. **Height:** 6in (15cm).



***Erica x darleyensis* 'Arthur Johnson'**
Winter-flowering variety with deep pink flowers and bronze-green foliage that turns copper in cold weather. **Special feature:** Colour-changing foliage. **Good for:** Extended bloom period and winter interest. **Grow with:** Contrasting white heathers. **Height:** 18in (45cm).

Heath, heather, or erica – which is correct?

Confusion exists between heaths (*Erica*) and heathers (*Calluna*), with many using these common names interchangeably. Fortunately, both groups share similar features and growing conditions, minimising issues.

Erica is the scientific name for heaths, increasingly used as a common name. *Calluna*, the scientific name for heathers, is rarely used commonly.

'Heather' sometimes describes both groups. The key difference: in heaths (*Erica*), petals carry the colour, while in heathers (*Calluna*), it's the calyx (persistent bud scales).

Top tips

- Plant Ericas in sites with at least six hours of sun in summer for best flowering
- Ensure well-drained, slightly acidic soil for most species (*E. carnea* tolerates lime)
- Prune immediately after flowering to maintain shape and encourage new growth

Dogwood

Cornus

Plant: autumn or spring

Position: full sun to partial shade

Hardiness: varies by species

Propagate: spring or summer

The vibrant red stems of Dogwoods in the winter are unmistakeable

Every garden needs pockets of easy-going cheerfulness and colour, and dogwoods are low-maintenance hardy shrubs that thrive in poor soil but need full sun to perform their best.

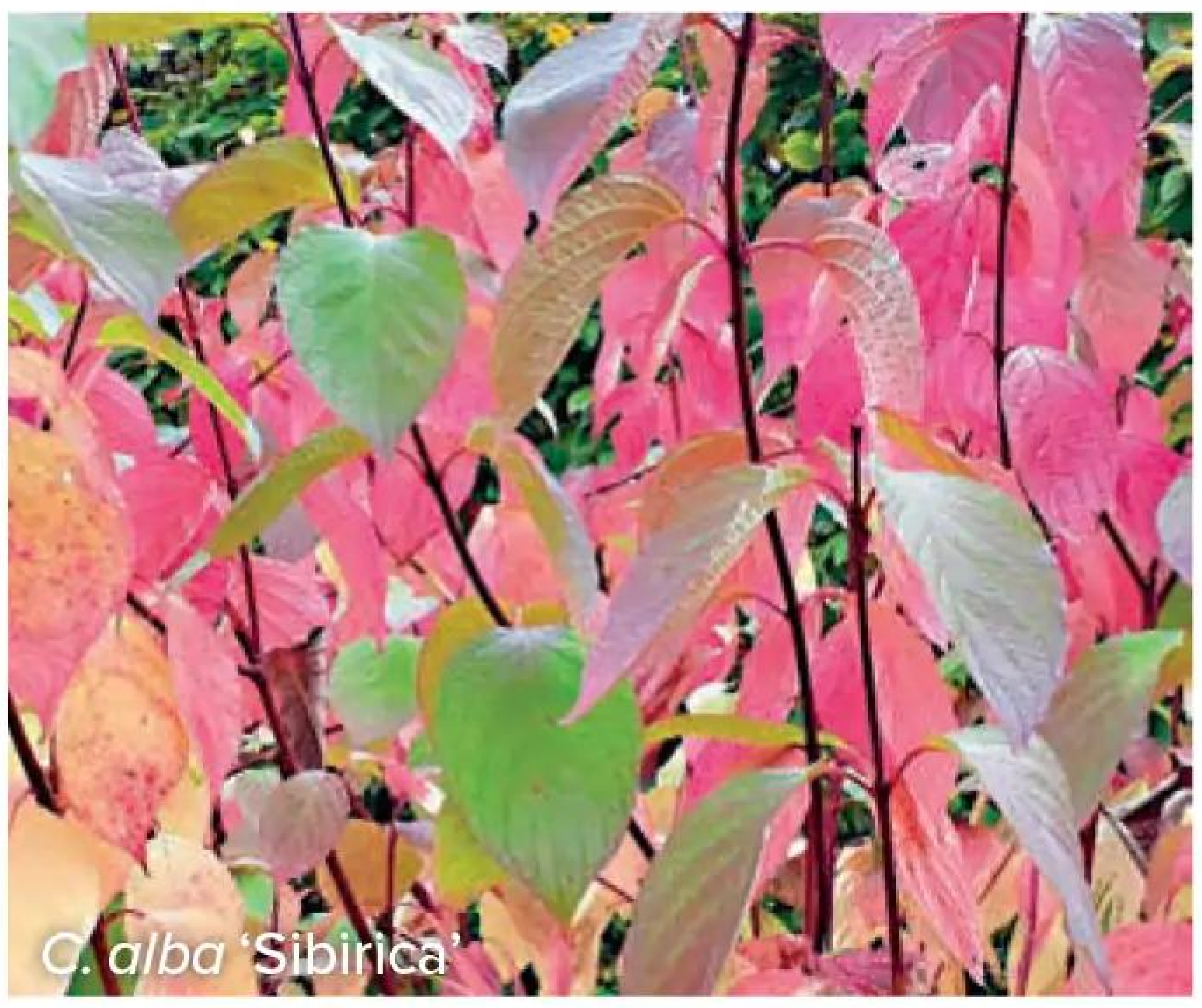
The red-barked dogwood we immediately think of is *Cornus alba*, as is the yellow-barked cultivar *C. stolonifera* 'Flaviramea'. The Cornelian cherry is *Cornus mas* and comes in yellow, varying shades of red, and white flowers.

Each species offers different seasonal interest. Their stems are often brightly coloured, rising on stiff woody branches above oval leaves that are covered in fine hairs and form a bushy shape.

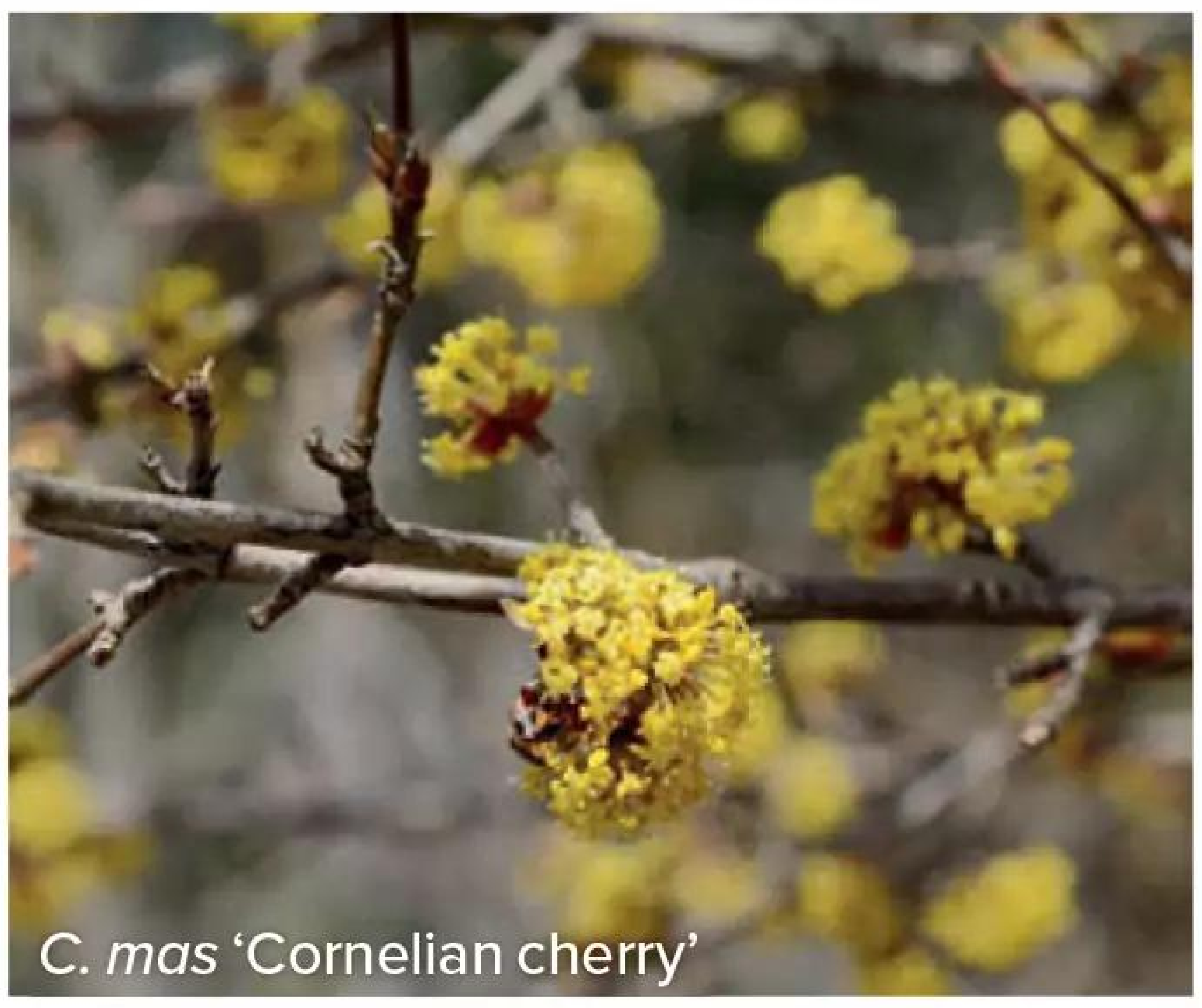
The flowers of *Cornus mas* appear in late winter or early spring before the leaves, producing clusters of small yellow blooms. In autumn, the leaves of many species turn attractive shades of red and purple before falling.

Dogwoods can flower from late winter to early summer, and if you plant some different species, you will have plants maturing at different times, giving you interest throughout the year. They are also prolific self-layers, so expect more plants to crop up in future years.

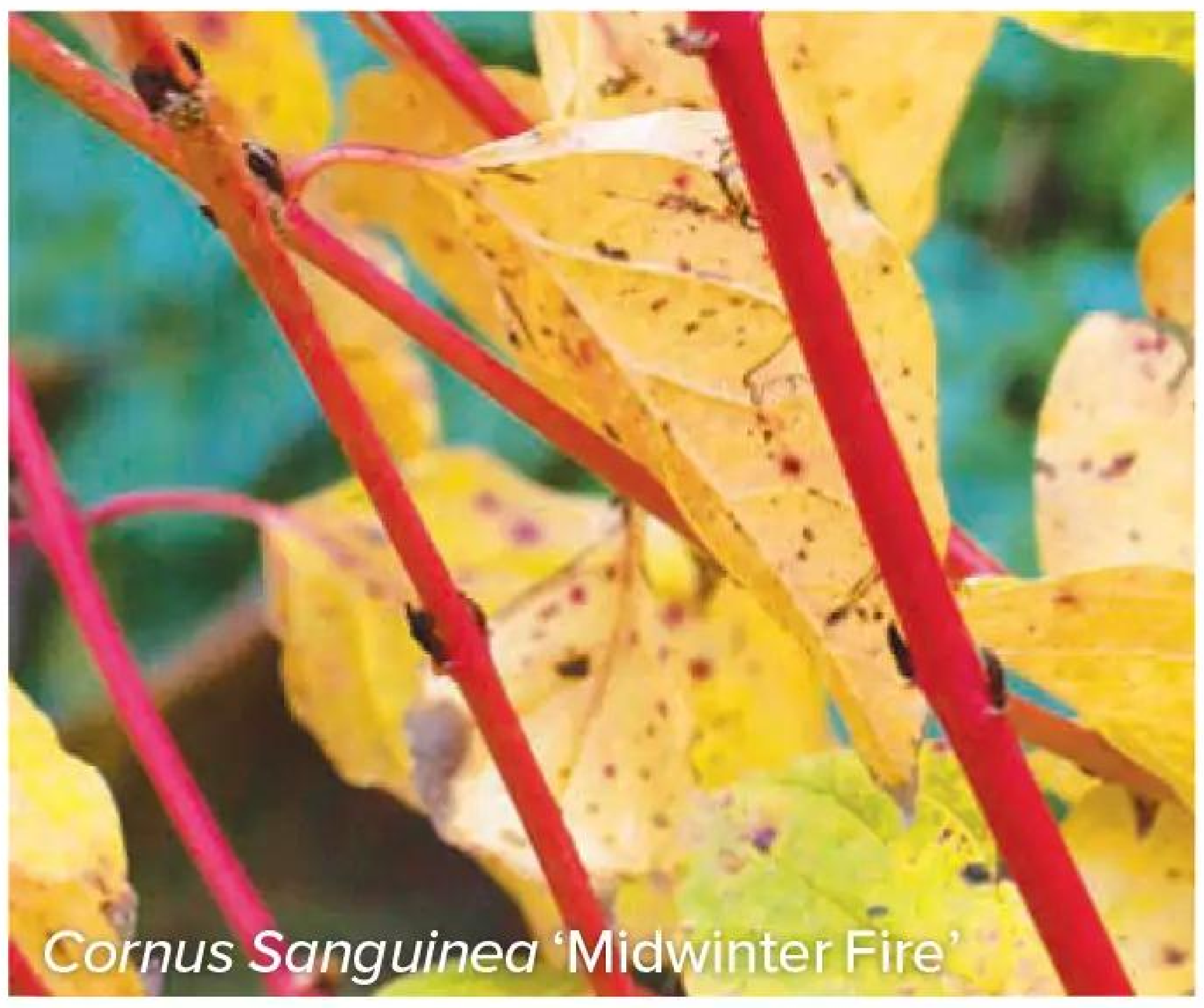
Annual dogwoods are great for poor soils, easy to grow, and look spectacular in winter.



C. alba 'Sibirica'



C. mas 'Cornelian cherry'



Cornus Sanguinea 'Midwinter Fire'

GROWING ADVICE

✿ **Site and position:** Most prefer moist, well-drained soil in full sun or partial shade

✿ **Hardiness:** Will tolerate low temperatures, hardiness varies by species

✿ **Planting:** Dig the soil with a fork, and incorporate a good quantity of organic matter. Plant at the same depth as it was in the pot, water well and mulch.

✿ **Propagation:** Dogwoods will liberally self-layer, and new plants can be separated from the parent. As well as letting them layer naturally, you can propagate by layering flexible young shoots in spring or summer.

Top tip

- Dogwoods thrive in moist soil and will happily self-layer into surrounding areas
- Prune in early spring for the best stem colour
- Great for winter interest and wildlife gardens

Foliage

Plant: spring or autumn

Position: full sun to partial shade

Hardiness: varies by species

Propagate: varies (cuttings, layering)

Shrubs for year-round interest

Every garden needs structure and multi-season appeal, and well-chosen shrubs can provide a range of colours, textures, and forms throughout the year

Many shrubs offer more than just a summer show. They can provide the fresh, frothy blossom in spring, kaleidoscopic euphoria of summer, fiery autumn colours, and winter structure. Some shrubs, like *Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea', offer bright stems in winter, spring flowers, summer foliage, and autumn colour.

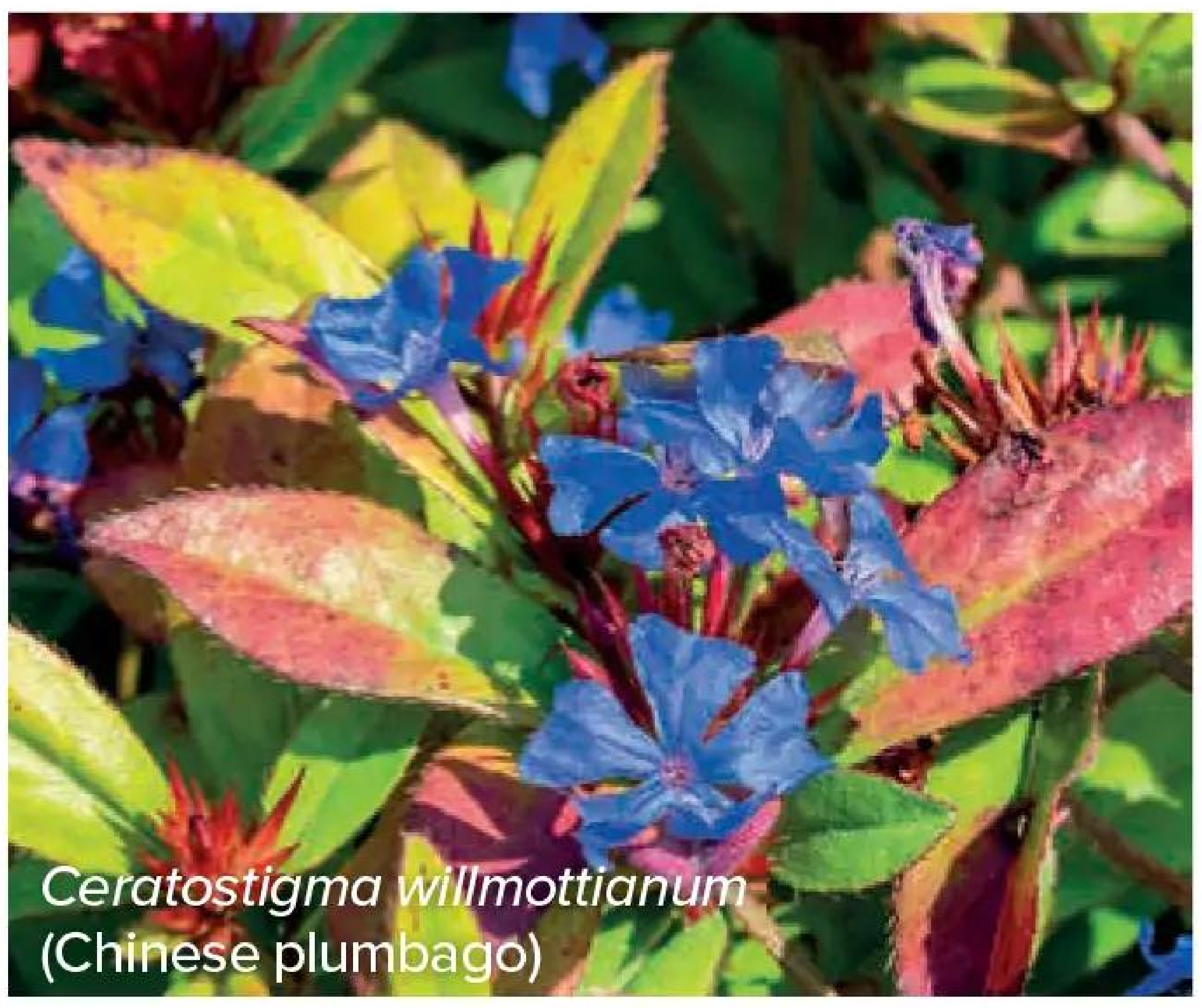
The foliage and stems of many shrubs can be used in floral arrangements, adding texture and longevity to bouquets. Shrubs like *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple' offer striking purple foliage throughout the growing season, followed by autumn colours.

Consider pruning some shrubs hard in late winter for more impressive foliage or stem colour

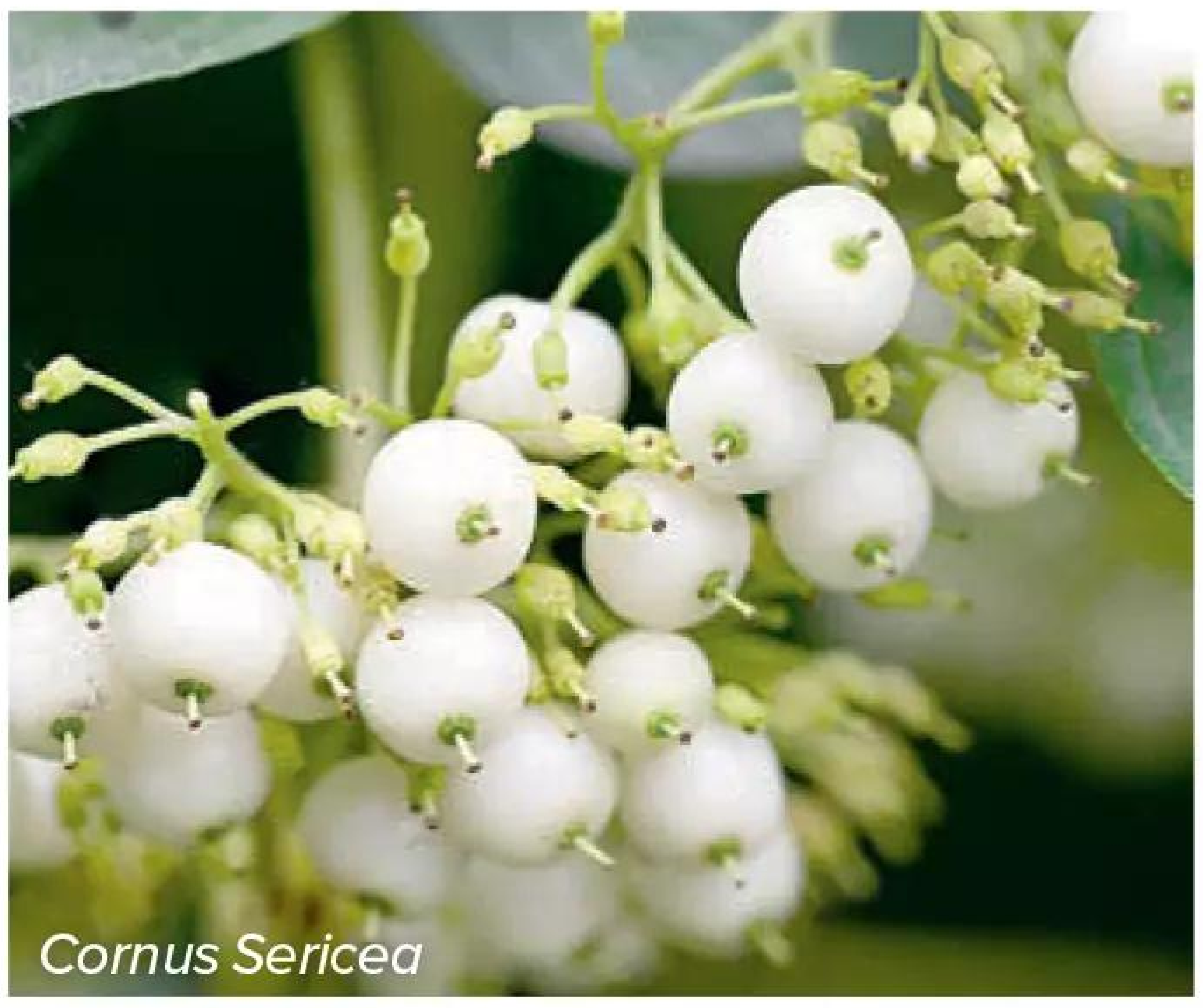
ALL PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK

Top tips

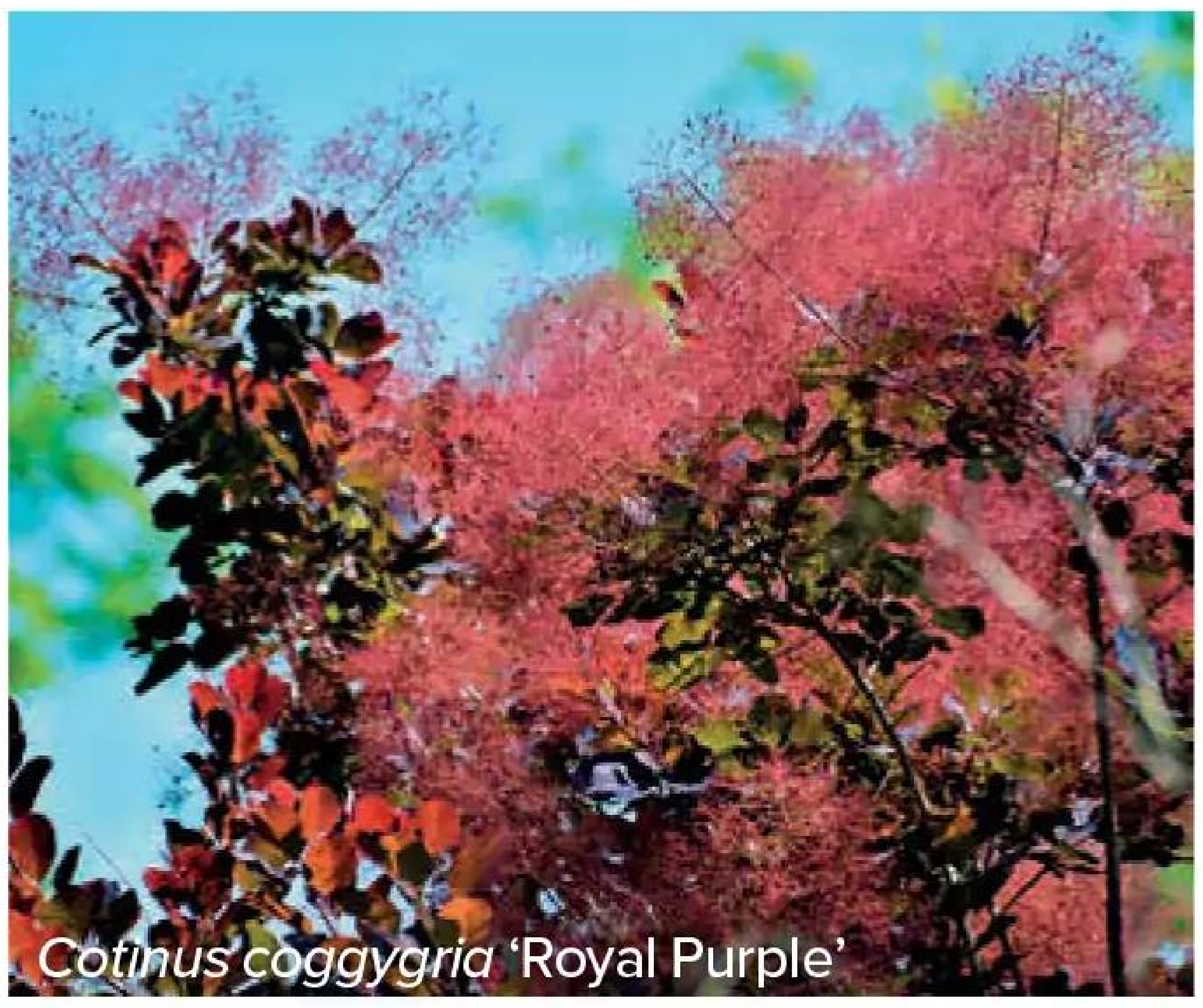
- Choose shrubs with varied seasonal interest for year-round appeal
- Plant in groups for maximum impact and to create a sturdy backbone for your garden



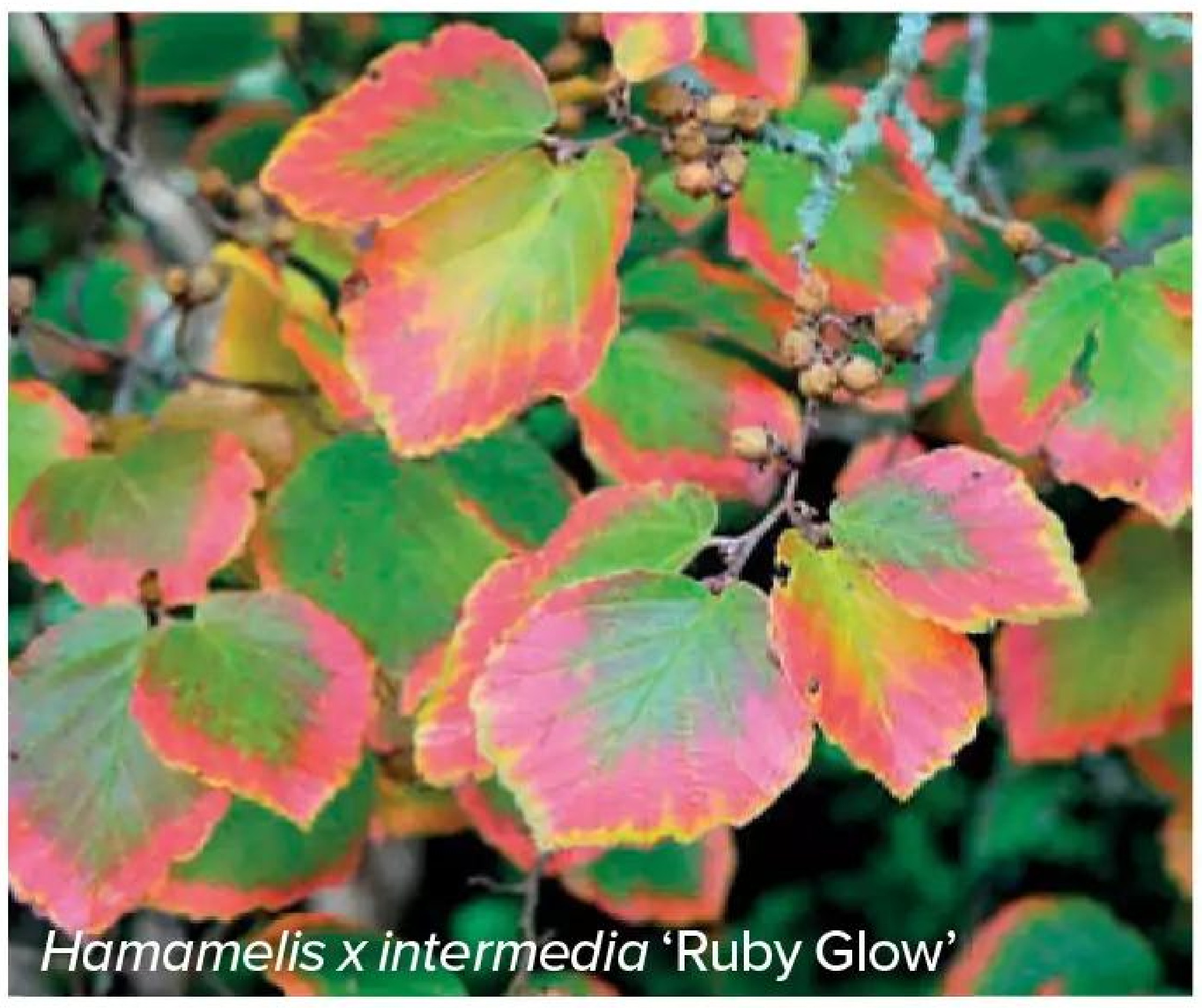
Ceratostigma willmottianum (Chinese plumbago)



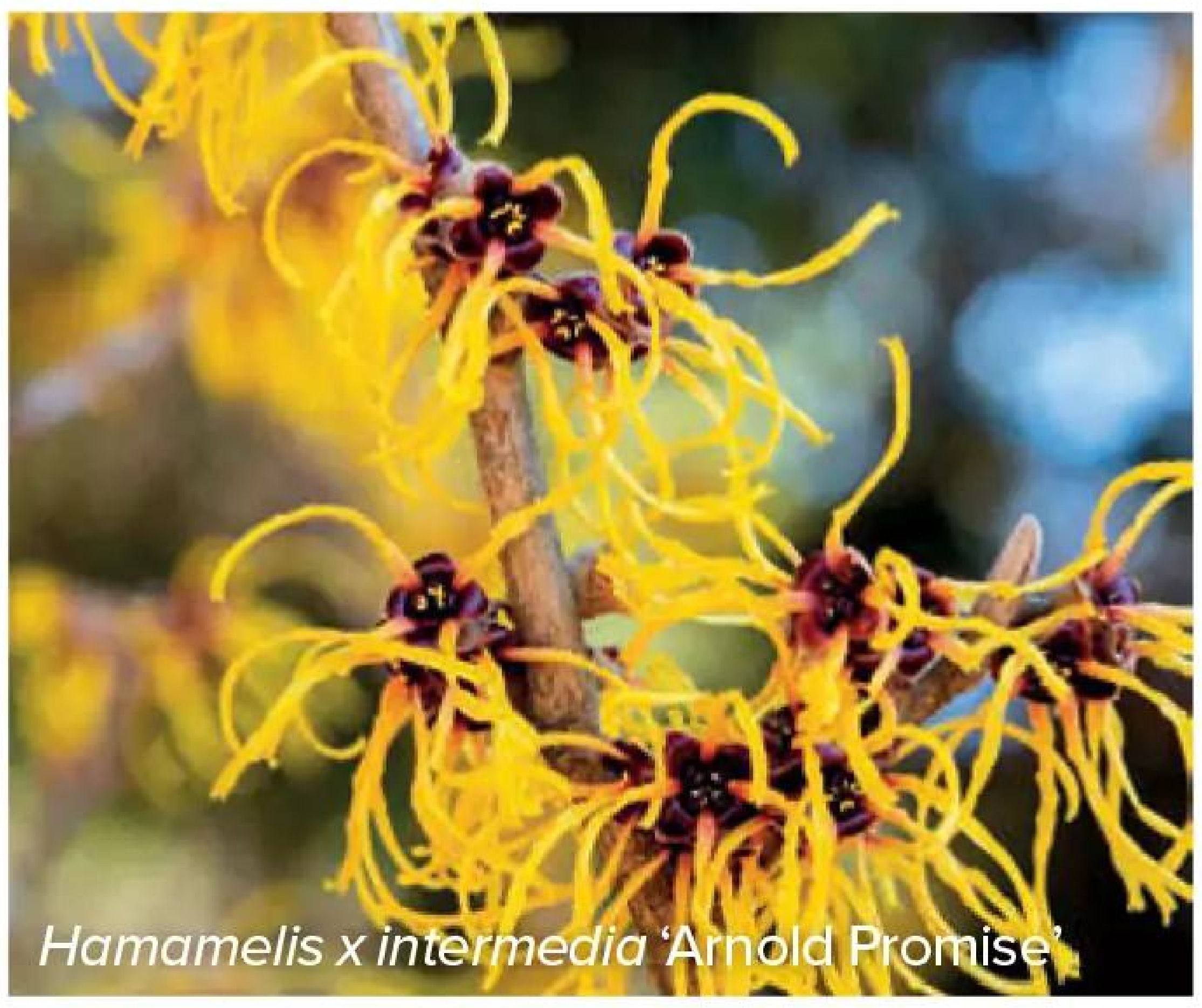
Cornus Sericea



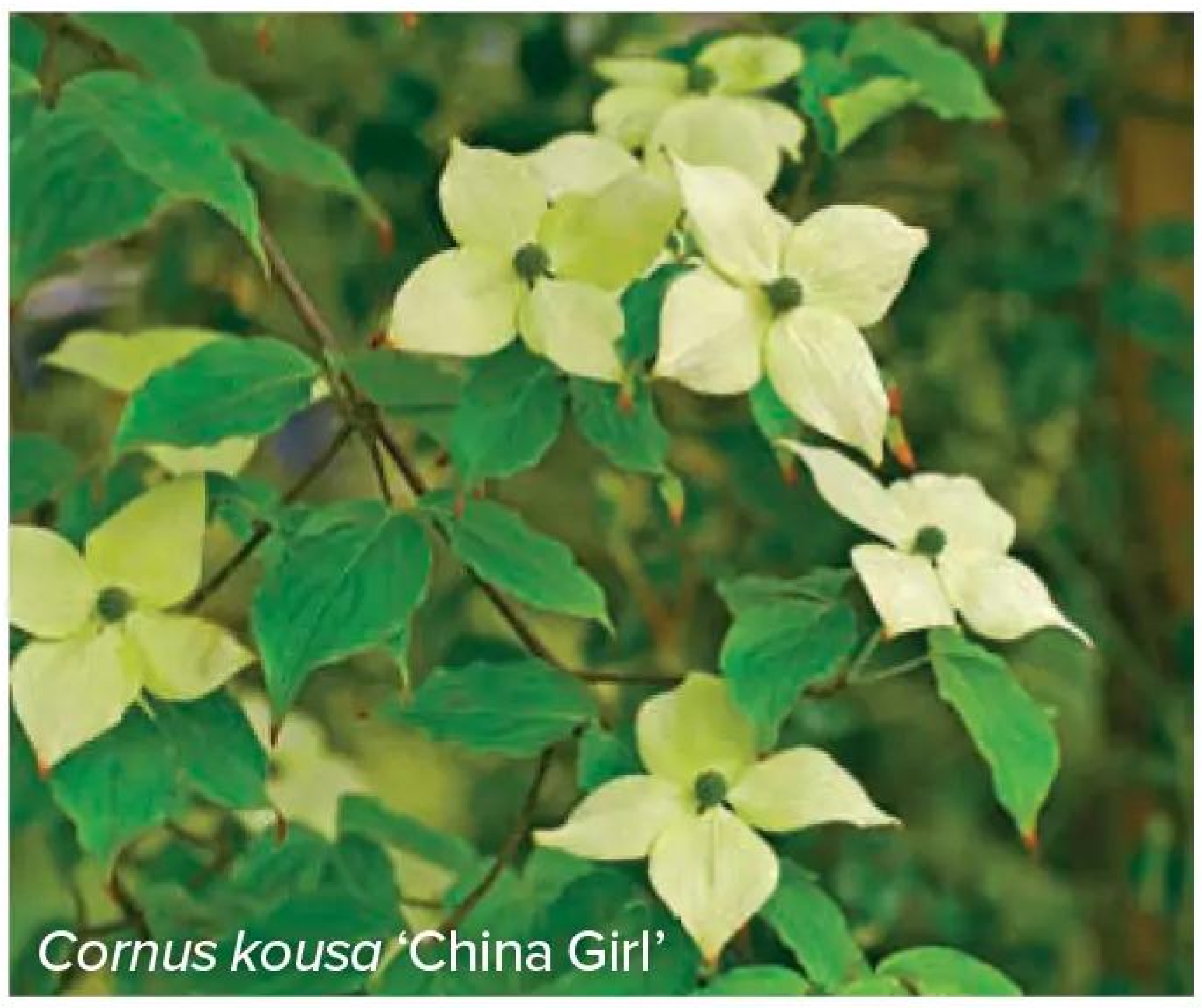
Cotinus coggygria 'Royal Purple'



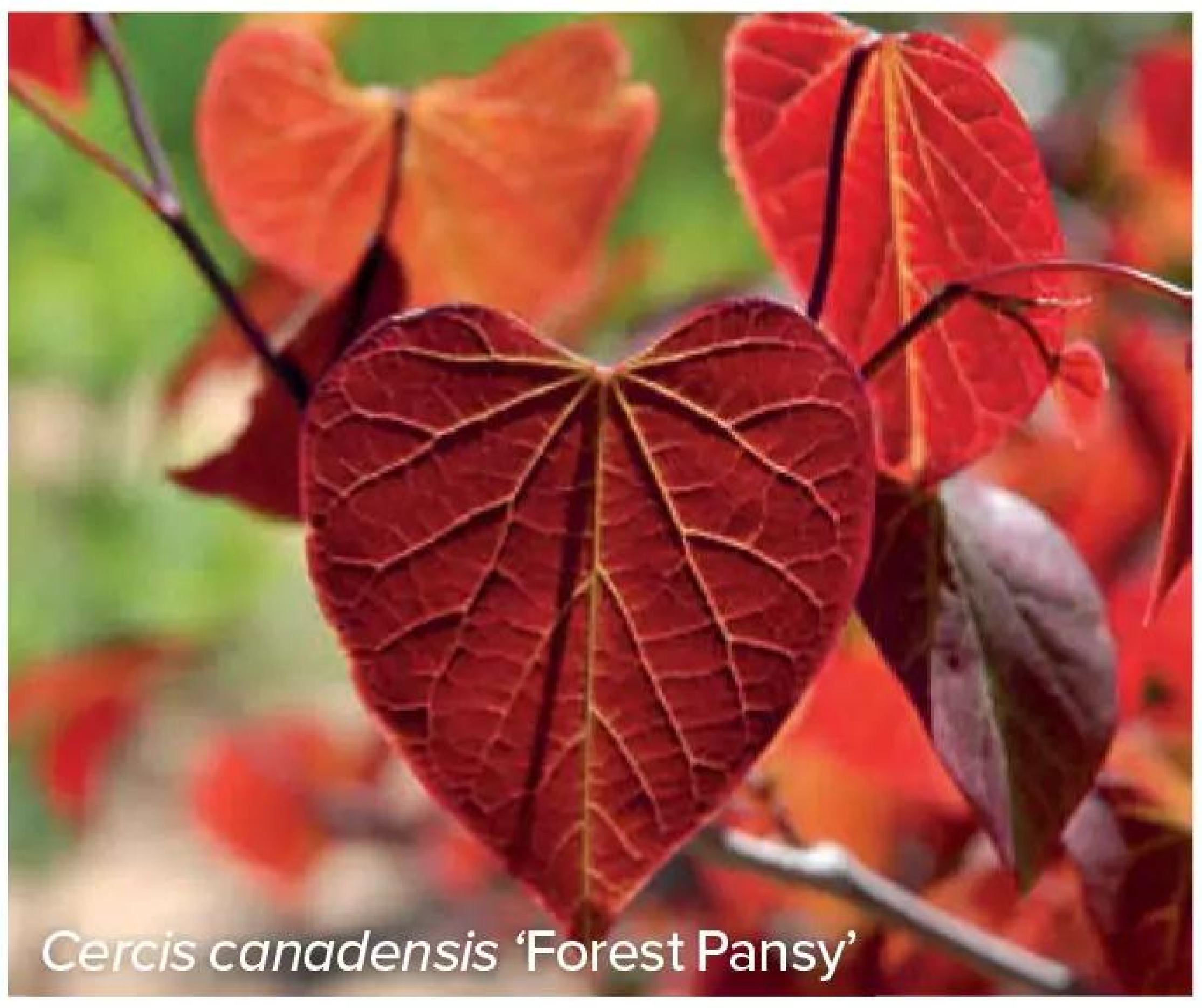
Hamamelis x intermedia 'Ruby Glow'



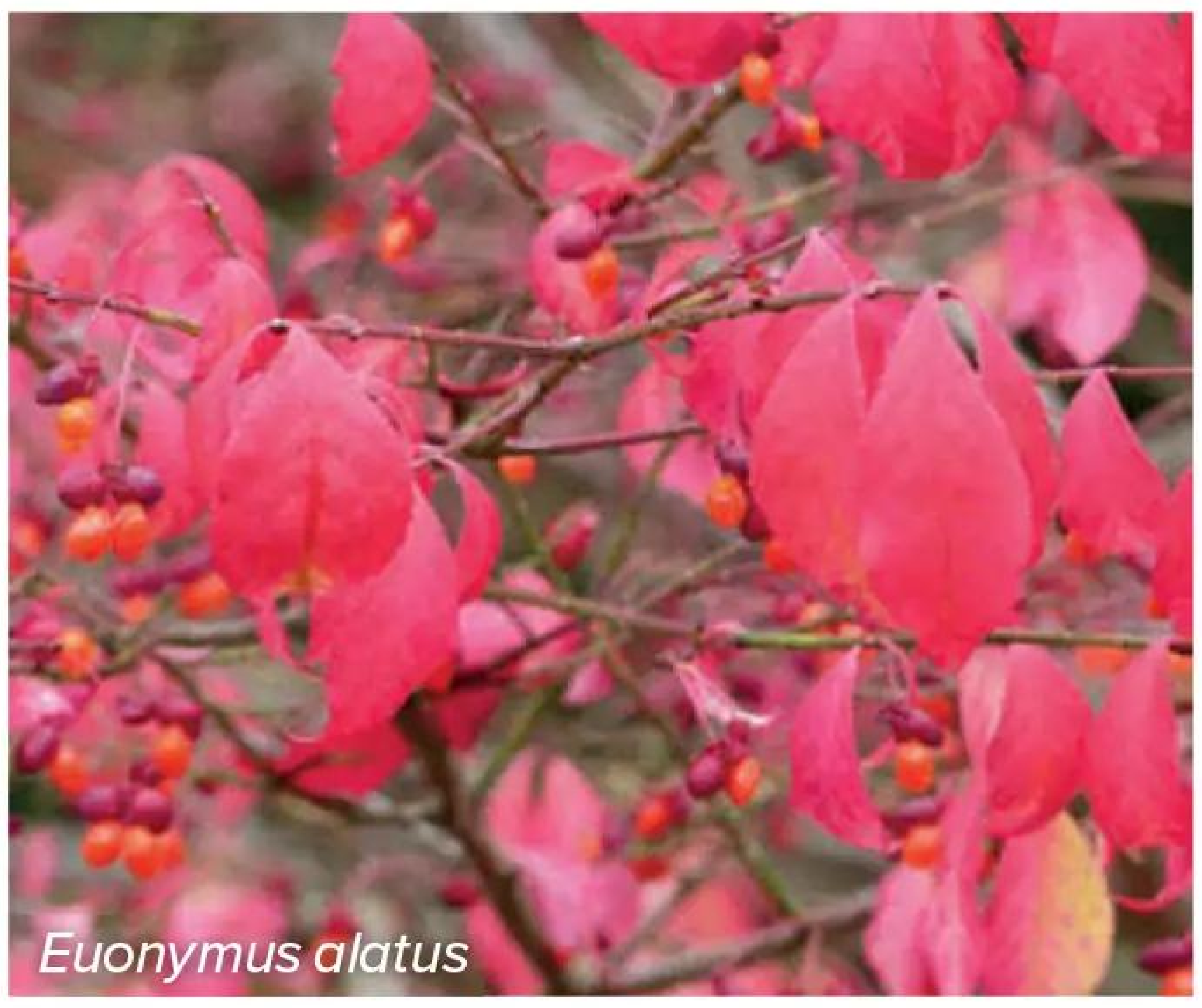
Hamamelis x intermedia 'Arnold Promise'



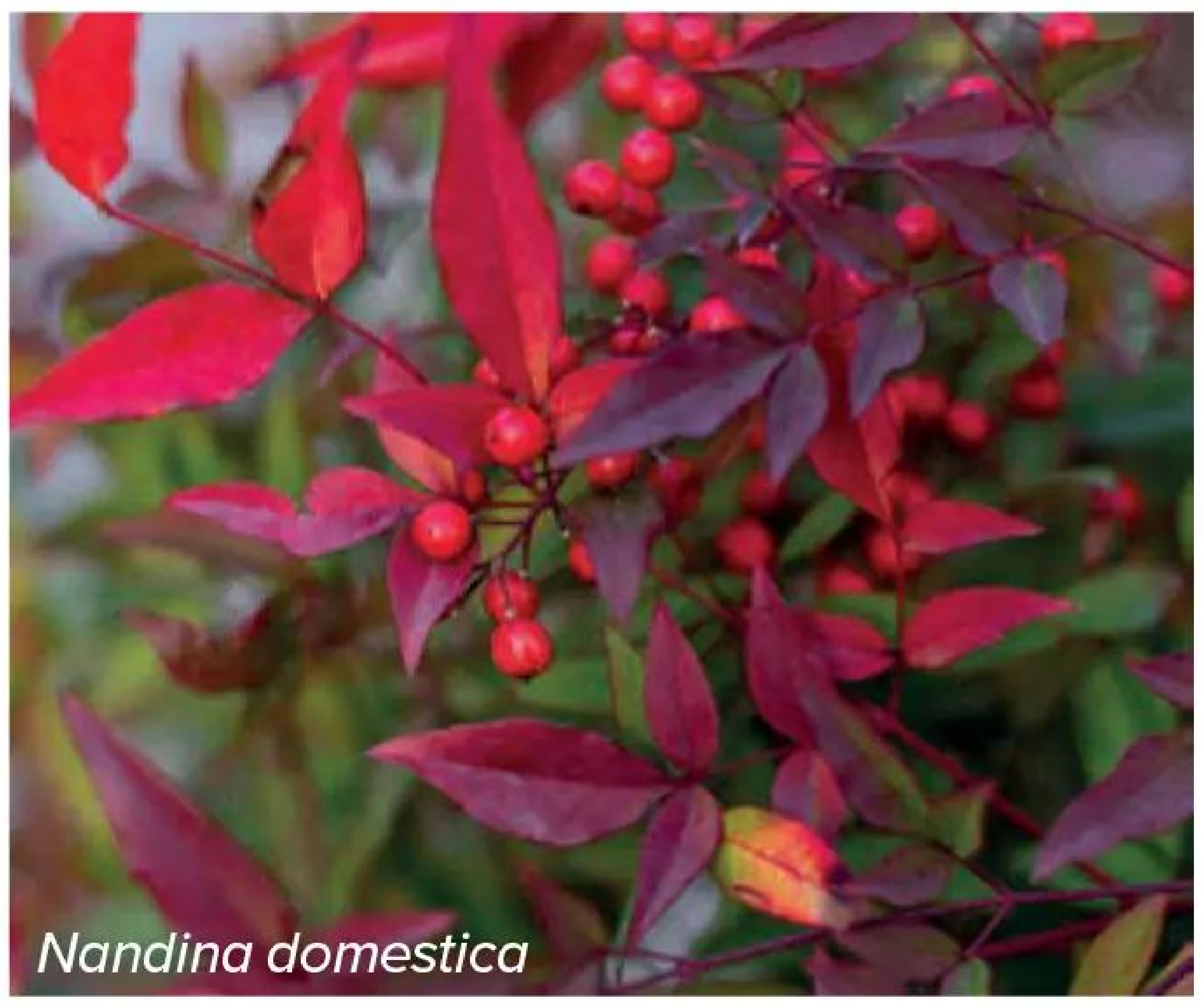
Cornus kousa 'China Girl'



Cercis canadensis 'Forest Pansy'



Euonymus alatus



Nandina domestica

GROWING ADVICE

- **Site and position:** Most shrubs prefer full sun to partial shade. Some, like *Cornus* species, tolerate wet soils.
- **Hardiness:** Varies by species. Many are hardy in most UK gardens, but check specific requirements.
- **Planting:** Plant in spring or autumn when the soil is warm and moist. Prepare the planting area by removing weeds and incorporating organic matter.
- **Propagation:** Many shrubs can be propagated by semi-ripe cuttings in summer or by layering in spring.
- **Care:** Water deeply during dry spells, especially for newly planted shrubs. Prune as required for the specific species to maintain shape and encourage best performance.

Standout evergreen

***Photinia x fraseri* 'Red Robin'**

This striking evergreen shrub offers year-round interest with its glossy leaves. New growth emerges bright red in spring, maturing to green. It produces clusters of white flowers in late spring and can be grown as a specimen shrub or a vibrant hedge. Maximum height: 4m (13ft). Prefers full sun for best colour, but tolerates partial shade.

Ornamental grasses

Plant: spring or autumn

Position: full sun, some varieties tolerate partial shade

Hardiness: varies by species, but many are hardy in UK climate

Propagate: division in early spring or late spring/early summer

Grasses offer year-round interest, with their striking foliage and decorative seedheads

If you're looking for low-maintenance plants that add elegance and movement to your garden, ornamental grasses are ideal

No matter how small the space or how packed with plants, you're unlikely to struggle to fit in a grass. One of the reasons grasses are so popular is the sheer variety of forms and textures they offer. From small, mounding varieties to tall, dramatic specimens – the range of sizes, shapes, and colours is huge.

Most grasses are easy to grow and will thrive in various conditions, creating striking planting combinations or bringing texture to overlooked areas. And you don't have to wait long to enjoy the benefits: plant a grass in the spring, and your border will be enhanced with its unique beauty that summer.

The best known are the summer-flowering varieties, but there are some beautiful types that will bring your garden to life in winter. *Miscanthus* cultivars offer winter structure with their dried stems and seedheads. In spring, look for fresh new growth from species like *Hakonechloa*; then, as you go into summer, varieties like *Stipa* and *Panicum* will transform borders with their airy plumes and colourful foliage.

With careful selection, it's possible to have ornamental grasses providing interest in just about every month of the year. Look for three that span different seasons, and you'll have long periods of texture and movement without losing too much border space.

PLANTING AND PROPAGATION

Ornamental grasses enjoy full sun, though some varieties tolerate partial shade. Whether this is in a bright border or emerging from a mixed planting scheme, most grasses prefer 'head in the sun with feet in the shade'.

Although planting in spring is often ideal, it risks stressing the plant in its first summer. So many are bought and planted in autumn, but will need protection from waterlogging in winter.

Dig a hole 12-18in (30-45cm) across and deep, retaining the top layer of dark, fertile soil. Add compost and a general fertiliser to the base of the hole. Plant with the surface of the compost at the same level as the surrounding soil, then fill with improved soil. Finally, firm well and water-in generously.

The simplest and most reliable approach for propagating ornamental grasses is division. In early spring, just as new growth begins to emerge, carefully dig up the entire clump. Using two garden forks back-to-back, prize the clump apart into smaller sections. Each division should have plenty of roots and some top growth.

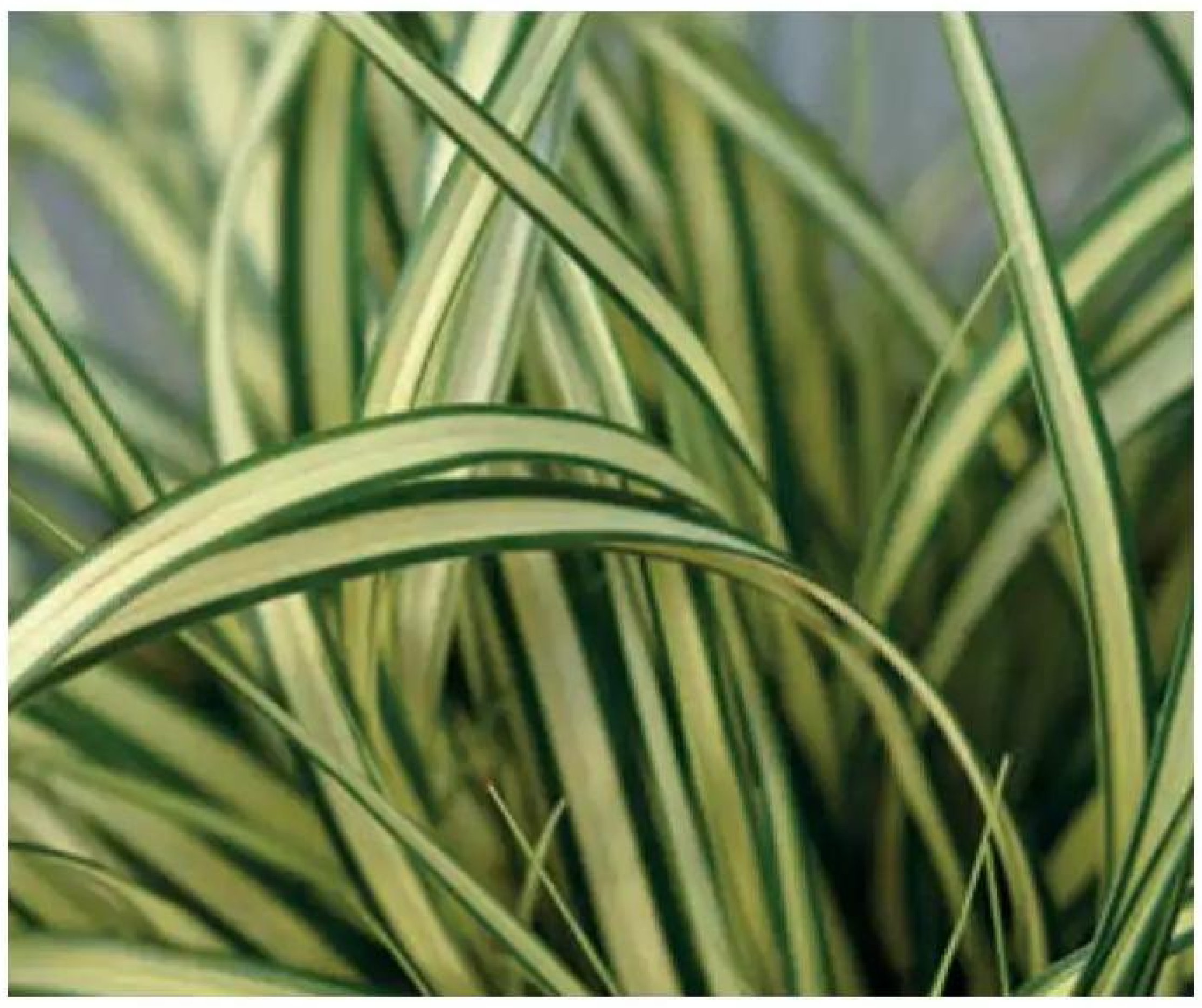
Replant the divisions immediately, ensuring they're at the same depth as they were originally growing. Water well and keep an eye on them during their first growing season, ensuring they don't dry out.

Some grasses, particularly warm-season types like *Miscanthus*, prefer to be divided when they're actively growing in late spring or early summer.

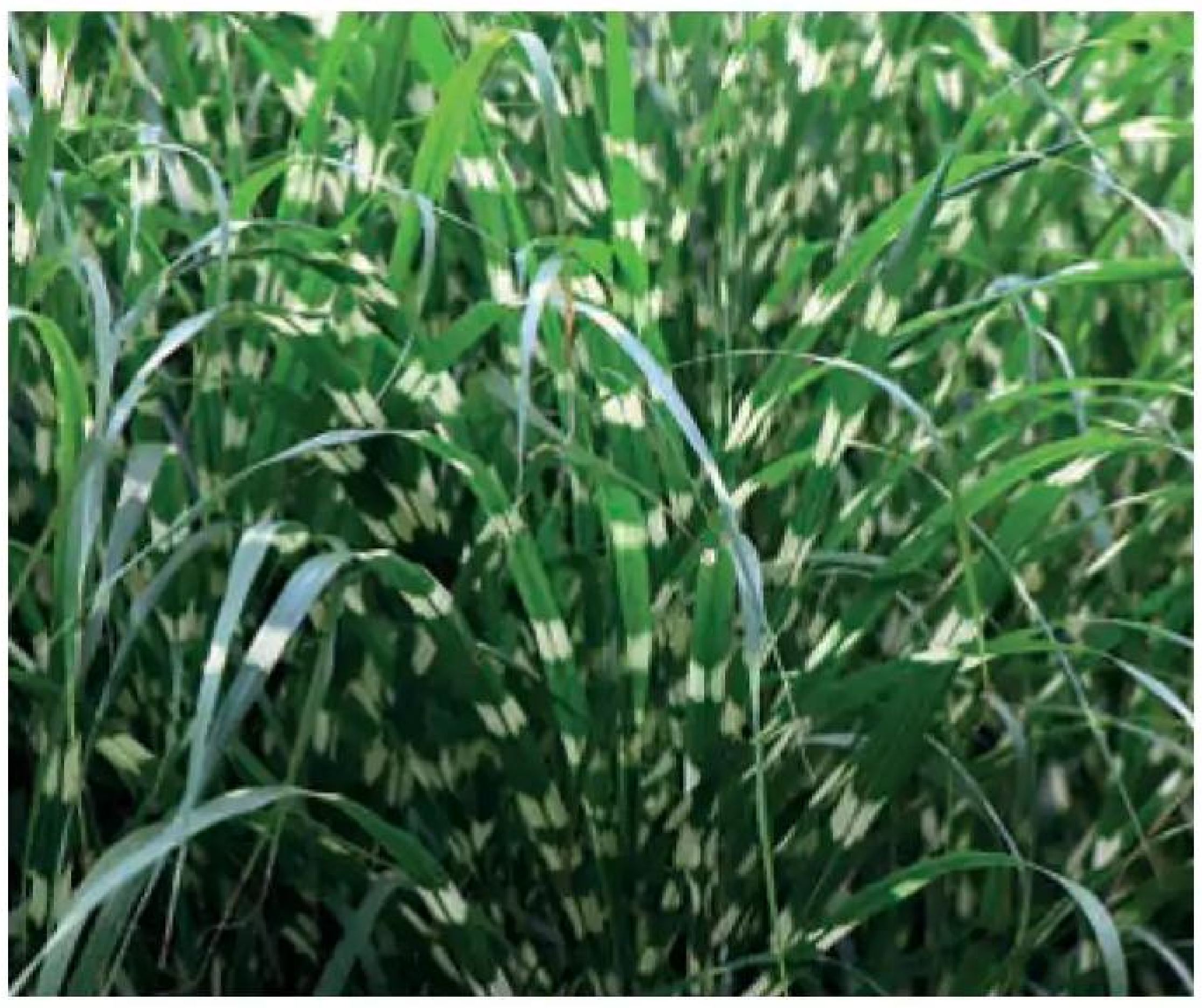
Top tips

- Certain grasses are very vigorous, reaching 6ft (2m) or more, so always check height guidelines!
- Grasses from the *Miscanthus* genus have been specially bred for long-lasting plumes and winter interest

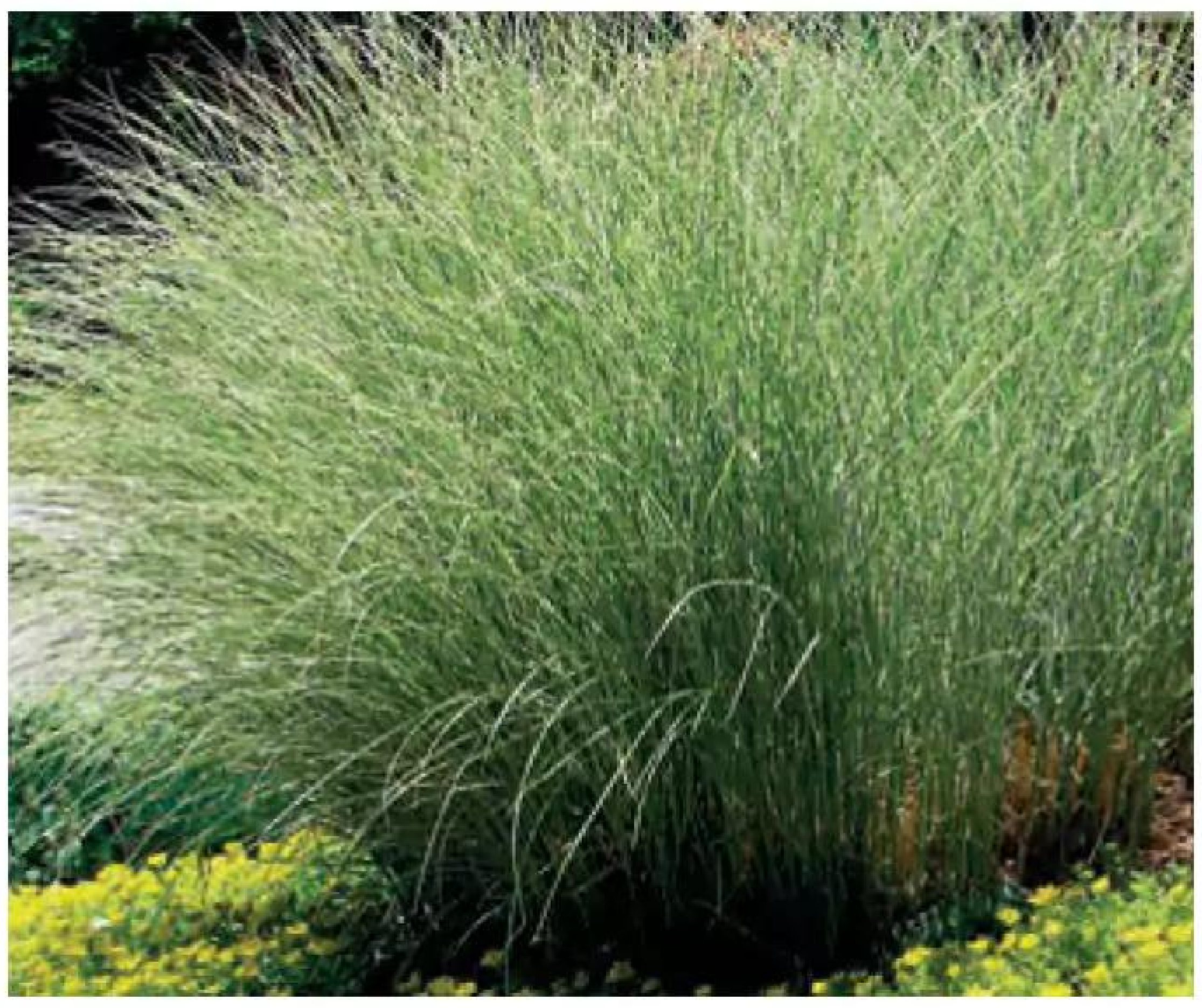
VARIEGATED FOLIAGE



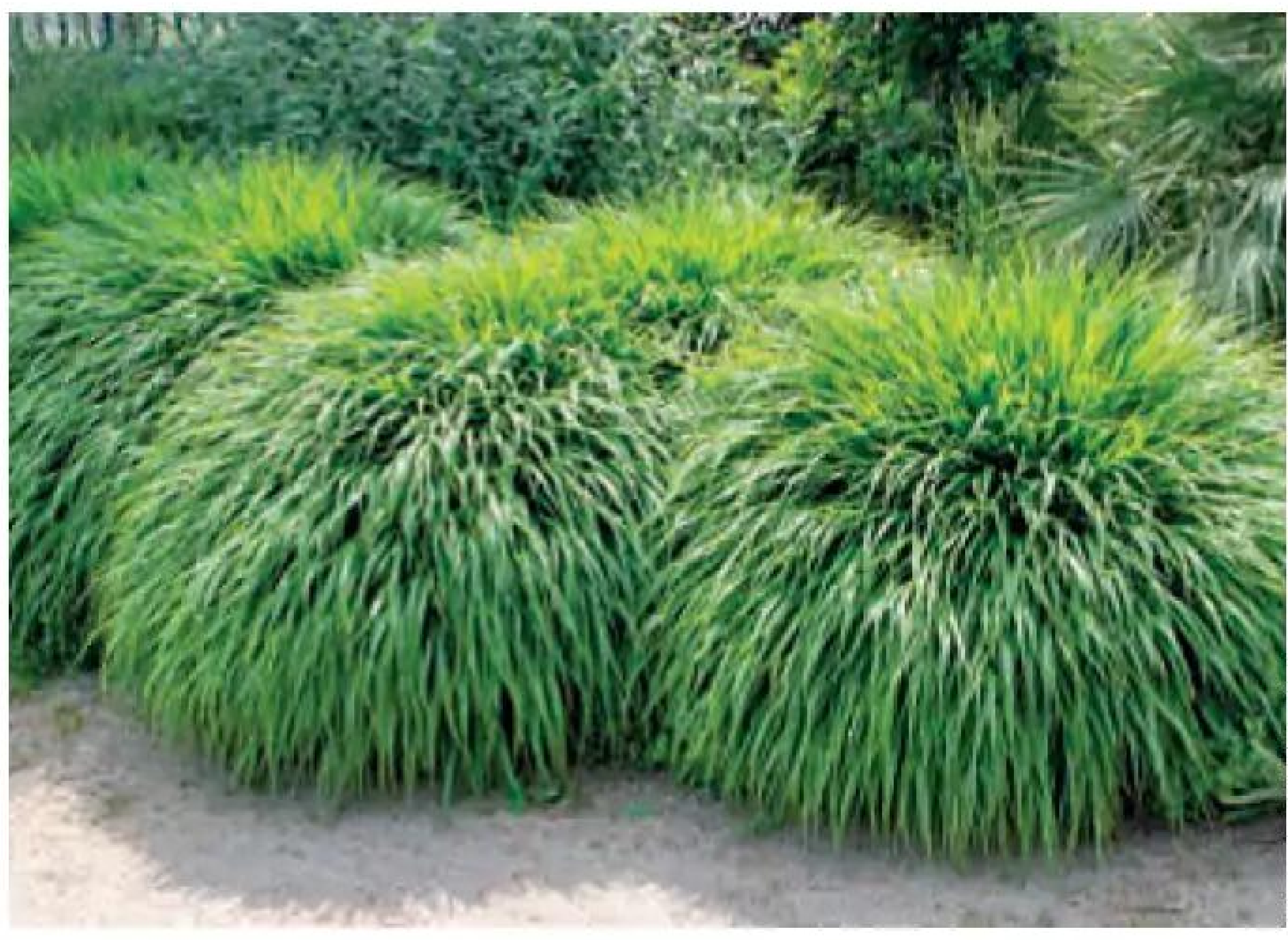
***Carex oshimensis* 'Evergold'**
A striking evergreen sedge with arching, variegated foliage. Cream-coloured stripes run the length of each leaf, creating a bright, cascading effect. Excellent for shady areas, container plantings, or as a ground cover. **HxS:** 12x18in (30x45cm).



***Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus'**
Known as zebra grass, this striking variety features green leaves with horizontal yellow bands. Copper-coloured flower plumes appear in late summer, turning silvery as they mature. Makes a bold statement as a specimen plant. **HxS:** 6x4ft (180x120cm).



***Miscanthus* 'Morning Light'**
This cultivar features narrow green leaves with fine white margins, creating an overall silvery appearance. Reddish-bronze flower plumes emerge in late summer, turning silvery as they age. Adds a luminous quality to borders and works well as a specimen plant. **HxS:** 5x3ft (150x90cm).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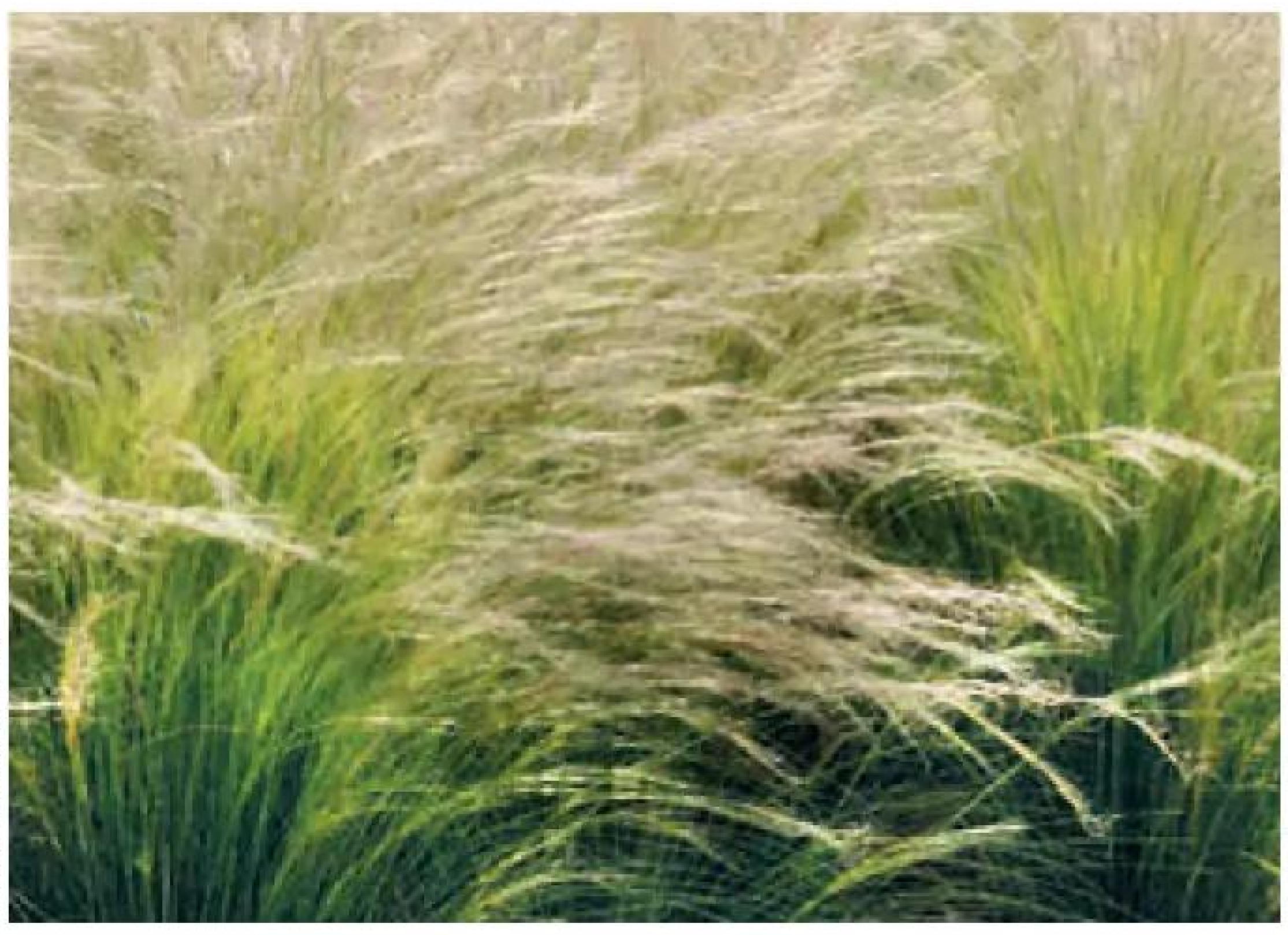
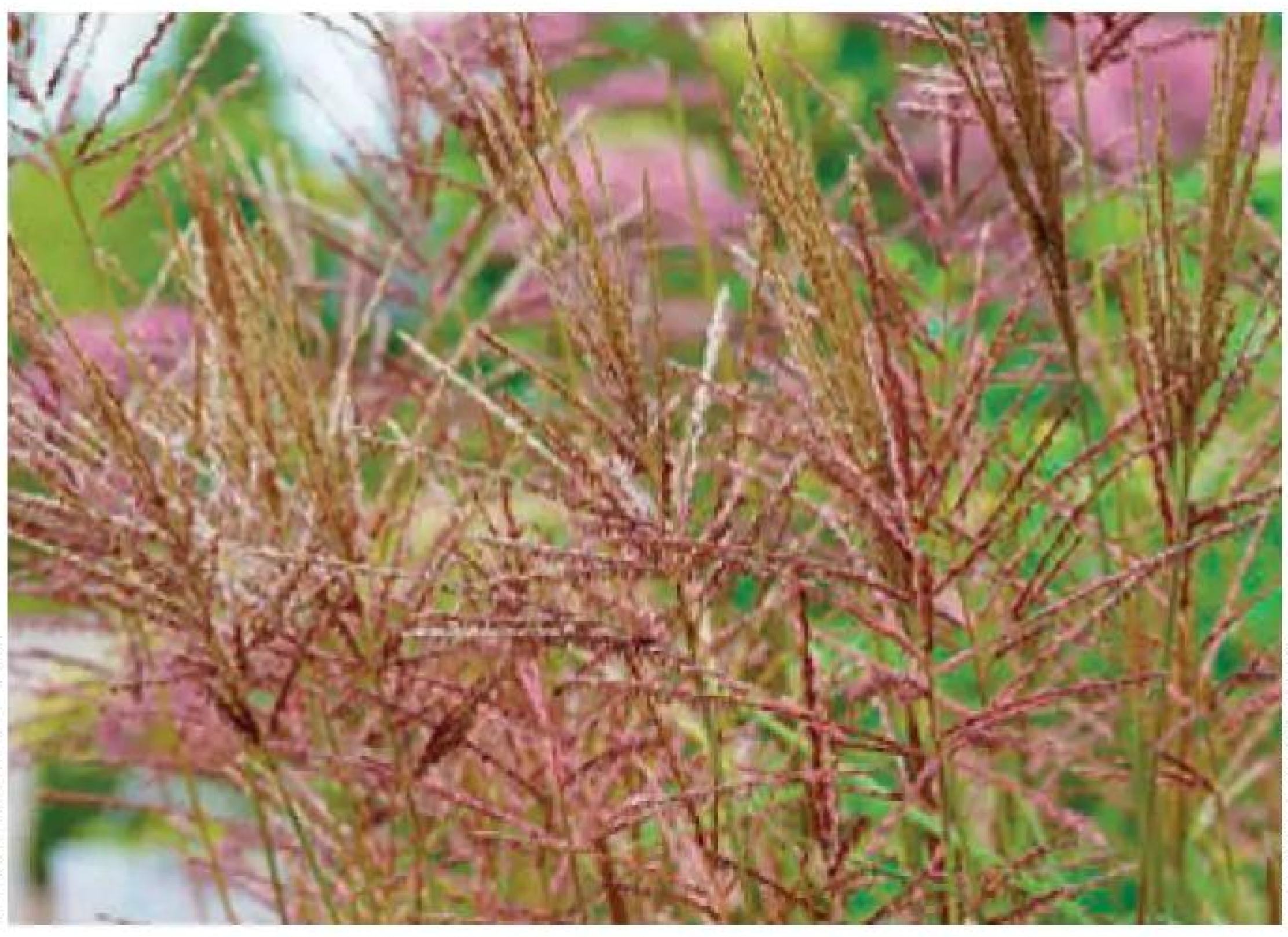
Hakone Grass (*Hakonechloa macra*)
This Japanese forest grass forms cascading mounds of arching, ribbon-like leaves to shady gardens. Green in summer, it often takes on golden and reddish tints in autumn. Ideal for woodland settings or container plantings. **HxS:** 18x24in (45x60cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

Stipa tenuissima
Also known as Mexican feather grass, this plant produces fine, hair-like green foliage that sways in the slightest breeze. Silky, oat-like seed heads appear in summer. Perfect for creating movement in borders. **HxS:** 24x24in (60x60cm).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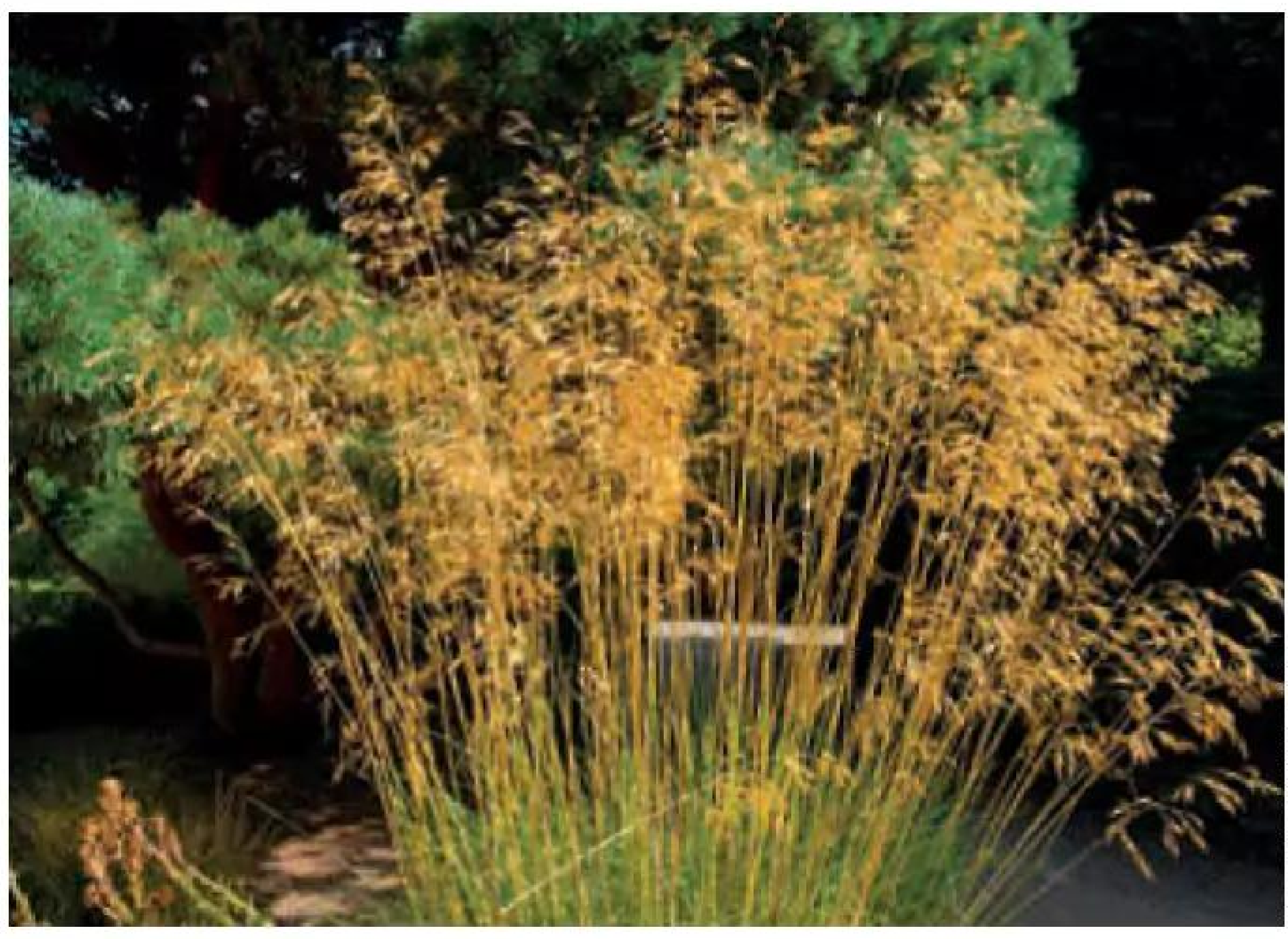
***Miscanthus* 'Flamingo'**
Tall and elegant, this grass produces narrow, arching green foliage topped with fluffy, pink-tinged plumes in late summer. The flowers fade to silvery-white, providing winter interest. Excellent as a focal point or screen in larger gardens. **HxS:** 5x3ft (150x90cm).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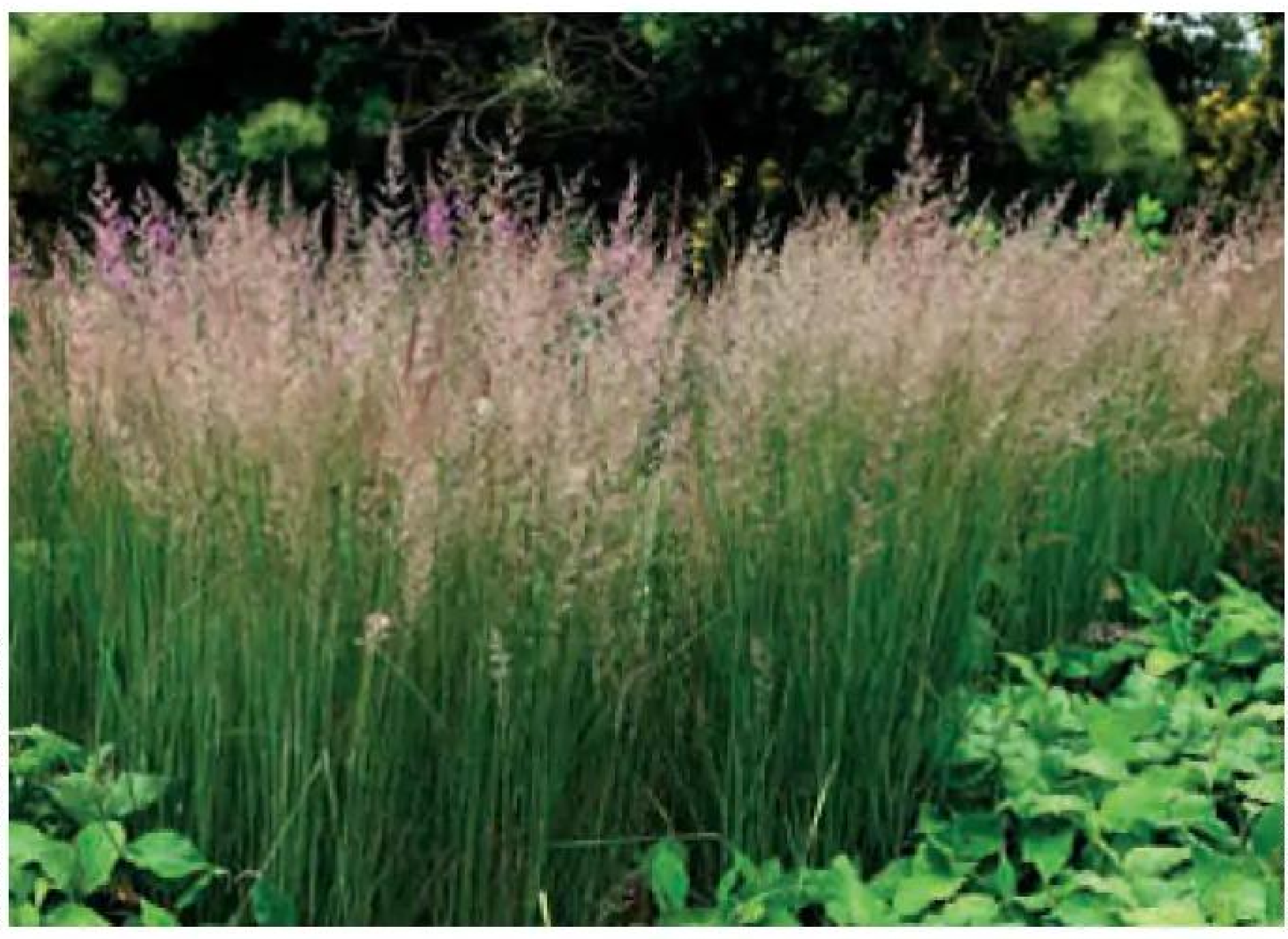
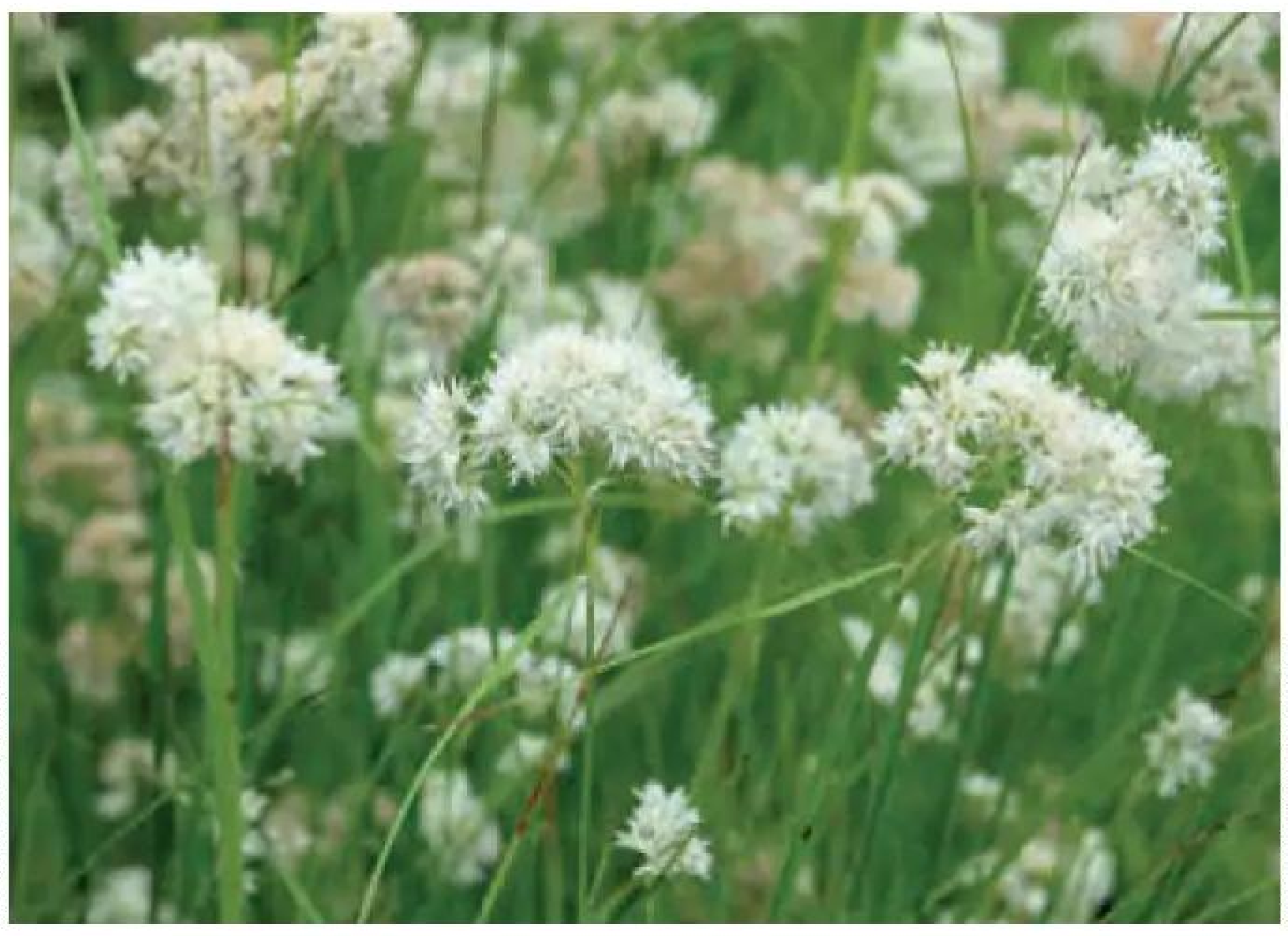
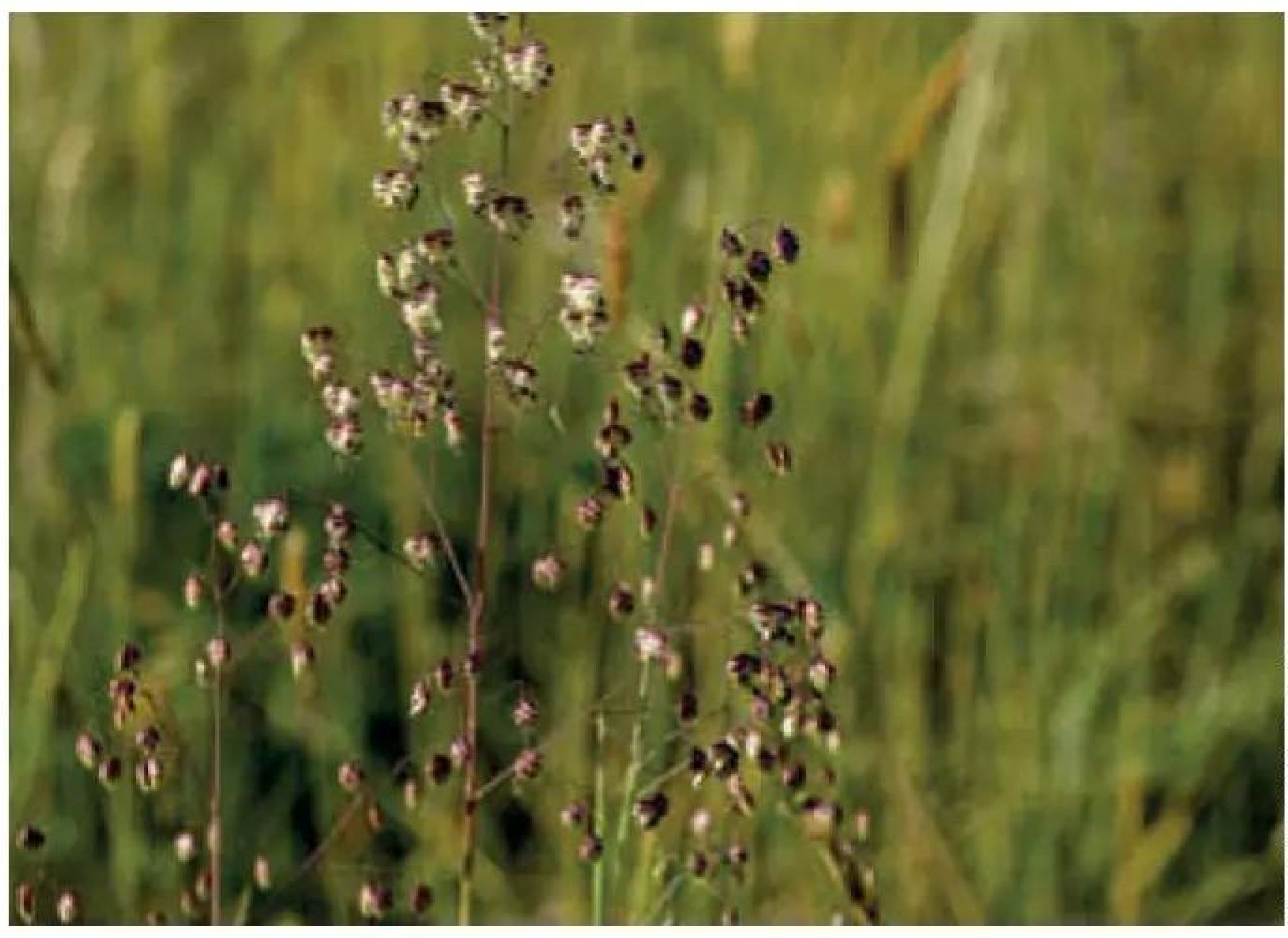
Giant Feather Grass (*Stipa gigantea*)
This impressive grass forms a basal clump of narrow, arching leaves topped by tall stems bearing large, golden, oat-like panicles. The flowers catch the light beautifully, adding a magical quality. Ideal as a specimen or in prairie-style plantings. **HxS:** 6x3ft (180x90cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

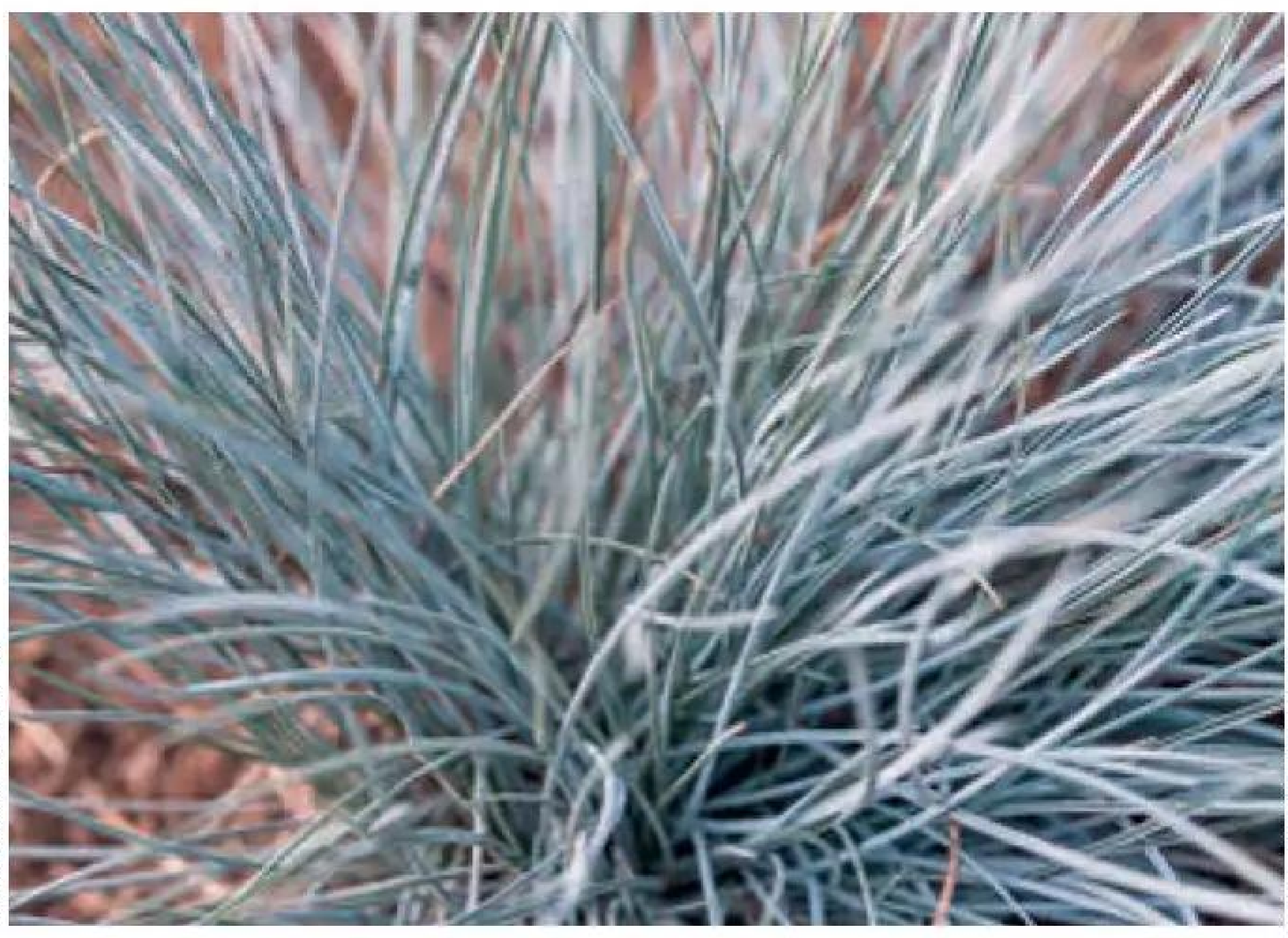
***Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'**
Clump-forming grass with narrow, arching green foliage and tall, feathery flower plumes that emerge bronzy-pink and mature to golden-tan. Maintains vertical interest in winter. Excellent as a screen/backdrop. **HxS:** 5x2ft (150x60cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

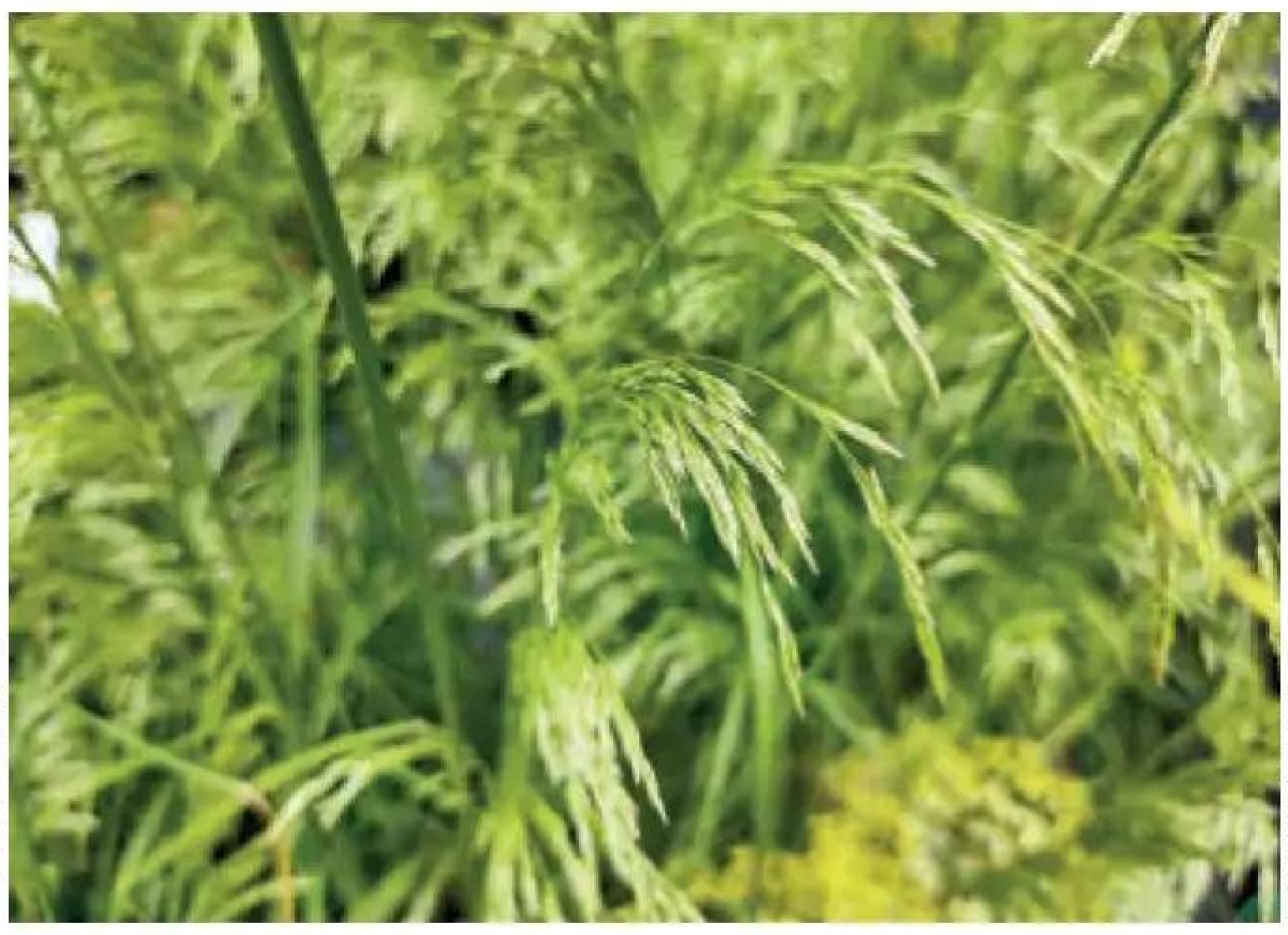
***Luzula nivea* (Snowy Wood Rush)**
This evergreen grass-like plant forms neat clumps of dark green, strap-like leaves. In summer, it produces airy panicles of small, snow-white flowers. Thrives in shady conditions, making it perfect for woodland gardens. **HxS:** 18x18in (45x45cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

***Briza media* (Quaking Grass)**
A charming grass with delicate, heart-shaped seed heads that quiver in the slightest breeze, giving it its common name. The seed heads start green and mature to a warm tan. Ideal for adding movement. **HxS:** 24x12in (60x30cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

***Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue'**
A compact mound of fine, intense blue-gray foliage year-round. Delicate tan flower spikes emerge in summer. Perfect for rock gardens/low-maintenance ground cover. Drought-tolerant once established. **HxS:** 10x12in (25x30cm).


SHUTTERSTOCK

***Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Goldtau'**
A neat mound of fine, dark green foliage, creating a soft, billowing effect in borders. A cloud-like mass of tiny, golden flowers on tall, slender stems high above the leaves in summer. **HxS:** 3x2ft (90x60cm).

PRUNING

Pruning ornamental grasses is straightforward but timing is crucial. There are two main groups:

1. Deciduous grasses (like *Miscanthus* and *Pennisetum*) should be cut back hard in late winter or early spring, before new growth emerges. Cut stems to about 6in (15cm) from the ground.

2. Evergreen grasses (like *Carex* and *Festuca*) simply need a tidy-up. In spring, comb through with your fingers to remove dead foliage, or trim back ragged ends for a neater appearance.

Never cut back evergreen grasses hard as this can damage the crown and may kill the plant.

SHUTTERSTOCK

CONTAINER GROWING

Grasses are excellent choices for container gardening, adding movement and texture to patios and balconies. Choose pots with adequate drainage holes and use a soil-based compost mixed with grit for improved drainage.

Water container-grown grasses regularly, especially during dry spells, and feed with a balanced liquid fertiliser monthly during the growing season.

Companion planting

Grasses pair well with a wide range of plants. Try planting low-growing grasses beneath roses, combine tall grasses with architectural plants like Alliums, or create a prairie-style planting by mixing *Panicum* and *Miscanthus* with late-summer perennials like Rudbeckia and Echinacea.

3 picks for Colourful foliage

***Panicum* 'Shenandoah'**
A compact grass with blue-green foliage that develops wine-red tips in summer, deepening to rich burgundy in autumn. Airy pink flower panicles in late summer. HxS: 3x2ft (90x60cm).

***Carex testacea* (Orange New Zealand Sedge)**
An evergreen sedge with fine, arching foliage that transitions from olive green to coppery-orange, especially in cool weather and full sun. Perfect for year-round colour and texture. HxS: 24x24in (60x60cm).

SHUTTERSTOCK

Pennisetum rubrum
This purple fountain grass has deep burgundy foliage and soft, bottlebrush-like flower spikes in shades of pink to purple. A standout in containers or borders. Note: Often grown as an annual in colder climates. HxS: 3x2ft (90x60cm).

Soil – it all starts here

Soil is the foundation of any thriving garden and the type of soil you have can greatly influence plant growth and overall garden health. The most common soil types are clay, sand, silt, chalk, and loam, and each has its own characteristics and challenges.

Clay soil retains water and nutrients well but can become waterlogged. Sandy soil drains quickly but may lack nutrients. Silt is fertile but can become compacted easily. Chalk soil is alkaline and often nutrient-poor. Loam, a balanced mix of clay, sand, and silt, is considered ideal for gardening.

Regardless of soil type, the presence of worms and other invertebrates is crucial. These organisms help aerate the soil, break down organic matter, and improve soil structure. Encouraging their presence through the addition of organic matter, and minimal soil disturbance is beneficial.

To improve your soil, consider adding organic matter such as compost or well-rotted manure. This helps enhance soil structure, water retention, and nutrient content. For specific soil types, targeted amendments can help. For instance, adding grit to clay soil improves drainage, while adding organic matter to sandy soil increases water retention.

Did you know?

The UK has over 700 different soil types, each with unique properties affecting plant growth and garden management

Top: Chalky soil will have a high pH.
Above: Sandy soil needs organic matter.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SOIL

✿ Soil health indicators

- Look for earthworms – their presence indicates healthy soil
- Check soil structure – crumbly soil is ideal
- Observe plant growth – stunted growth may indicate soil issues
- Test pH levels - most plants prefer slightly acidic to neutral soil

✿ Understanding soil pH

Soil pH affects nutrient availability to plants. Most plants prefer slightly acidic to neutral soil (pH 6.0-7.0). Test your soil pH with a kit from garden centers. Lime can raise pH in acidic soils, while sulfur can lower pH in alkaline soils. Some plants, like rhododendrons, azaleas and heathers prefer acidic soils

✿ Improving soil structure

- Add organic matter regularly
- Avoid walking on soil when wet
- Use raised beds to prevent soil compaction
- Practice crop rotation in vegetable gardens

✿ Nutrient management

- Conduct a soil test to determine nutrient levels
- Use organic fertilisers for slow-release nutrients
- Practice companion planting to balance soil nutrients
- Consider green manures to add nutrients naturally

✿ Soil moisture control

- Mulch beds to retain moisture and suppress weeds
- Install proper drainage in waterlogged areas
- Use water-retaining products in sandy soils
- Water deeply but less frequently to encourage deep root growth

✿ Soil-friendly gardening practices

- Adopt no-dig methods to preserve soil structure
- Use cover crops to protect soil over winter
- Avoid over-tilling, which can damage soil structure
- Compost garden waste to create your own soil improver

The role of mycorrhizal fungi

Mycorrhizal fungi form symbiotic relationships with plant roots, enhancing nutrient and water uptake. These beneficial fungi can be added to soil when planting to improve plant health and growth. They're especially useful in poor or disturbed soils, helping to establish plants more quickly.

How to... Boost your soil

1.

Homemade compost is a great soil conditioner, adding nutrients and beneficial microbes and opening up heavy clay.

2.

Let manure rot down for a few months before incorporating into soil, otherwise the nitrogen contents will damage plant roots.

3.

A little grit mixed into compost or manure helps to open up heavy soils and improve drainage.

4.

Old compost can be added to beds to act as a soil conditioner, even though it will be low on nutrients.

Planting success

Proper planting is crucial for the success of any garden, whether you're adding annuals, perennials, shrubs, or trees, and the key lies in thorough preparation and understanding the needs of your plants.

For most plants, the ideal planting time is either spring or autumn when the soil is usually warm – and rain is usually plentiful! However, container-grown plants can often be planted year-round, provided the ground isn't frozen or waterlogged.

When planting, dig a hole twice the width of the root ball and to the same depth. Loosen the soil at the bottom and sides of the hole to encourage root growth. Place the plant at the same level it was growing in its pot, backfill with soil, and firm gently. There are some exceptions to this, however. Plant roses about 1-2 inches deeper than they were in their pots to protect the graft union. Clematis also benefit from being planted 2-3 inches deeper than they were in their pots, which encourages more stems to grow from below ground level. Planting lily bulbs a bit deeper can help them stand up better and produce more stem roots for improved nutrition, and bearded iris should be planted with the top of the rhizome just at or slightly below soil level.

For trees, the process is similar but on a larger scale. Dig a hole three times the width of the root ball. Avoid adding compost or manure to the hole as this can discourage roots from spreading into the surrounding soil. Instead, sprinkle mycorrhizal fungi on the roots to help them establish. After planting, water thoroughly and apply a layer of mulch, keeping it away from the stem/trunk.

Mycorrhizal fungi applied to tree roots to help them get established.

HANDY ADVICE

✿ Timing your planting

- Plant deciduous trees and shrubs in late autumn or early spring
- Plant evergreens in early autumn or late spring
- Sow hardy annuals in autumn for early summer flowers
- Plant tender bedding plants after the last frost

✿ Soil preparation

- Remove weeds and large stones from the planting area
- Improve soil structure by adding organic matter
- For clay soils, add grit to improve drainage
- For sandy soils, add compost to improve water retention

✿ Plant care after planting

- Water regularly, especially during dry spells
- Apply a layer of mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds
- Stake tall plants and trees to provide support
- Prune as needed to encourage healthy growth

✿ Planting in containers:

- Use high-quality potting mix, not garden soil
- Ensure containers have adequate drainage holes
- Choose appropriate-sized containers for your plants
- Water container plants more frequently than those in the ground

✿ Troubleshooting common planting issues:

- Yellowing leaves may indicate overwatering or nutrient deficiency
- Wilting can be a sign of underwatering or root damage
- Slow growth might suggest poor soil conditions or incorrect planting depth
- Pest damage may require targeted treatment or improved plant health

Don't forget...

Roses need to be planted with their graft below soil level

The importance of aftercare

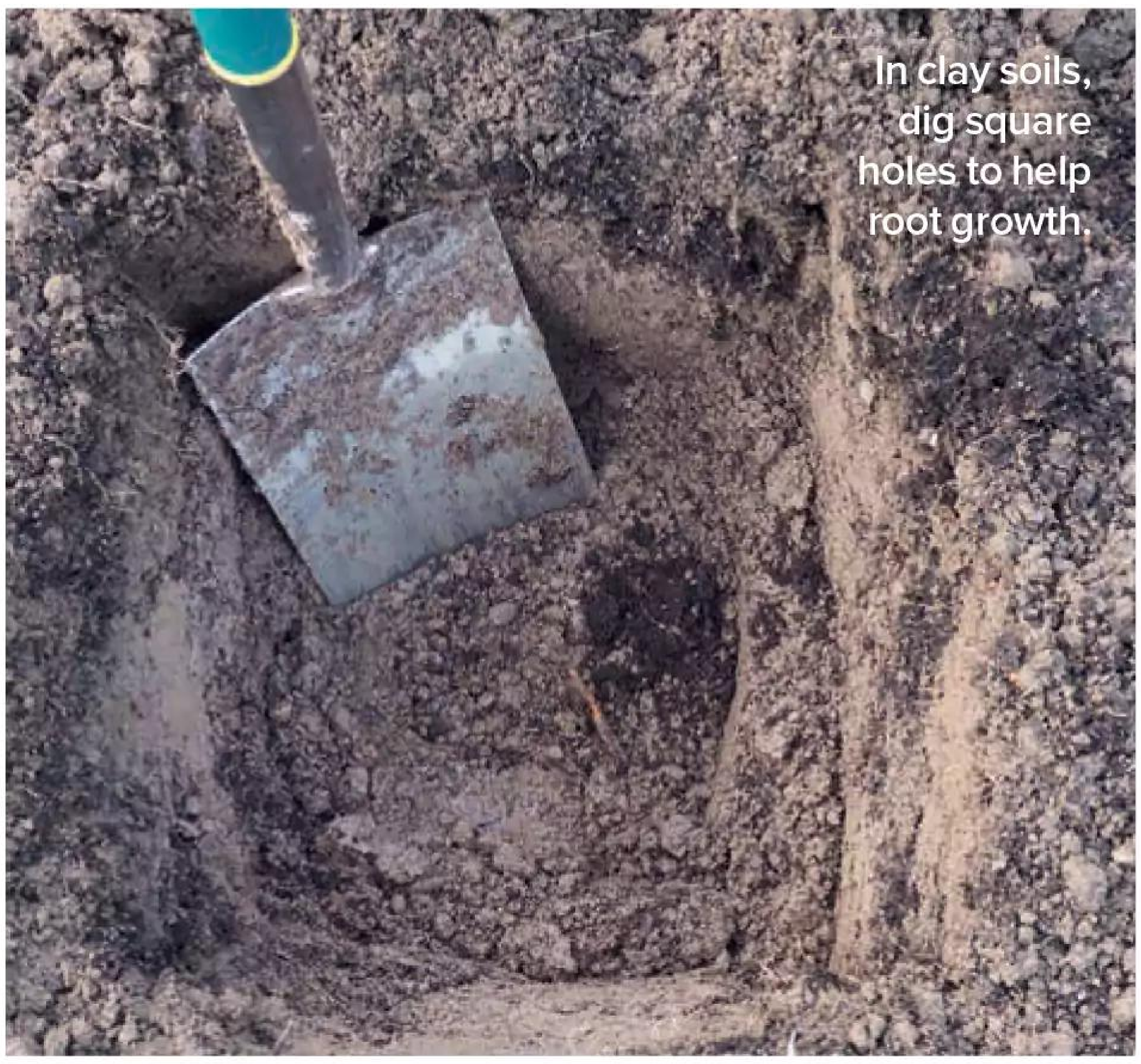
Proper aftercare is crucial for newly planted specimens. Regularly check tree stakes are firm, top up mulch, and maintain a weed-free circle at least 1m wide around the base. Water consistently during the first spring and summer, especially in dry periods.

Did you know?

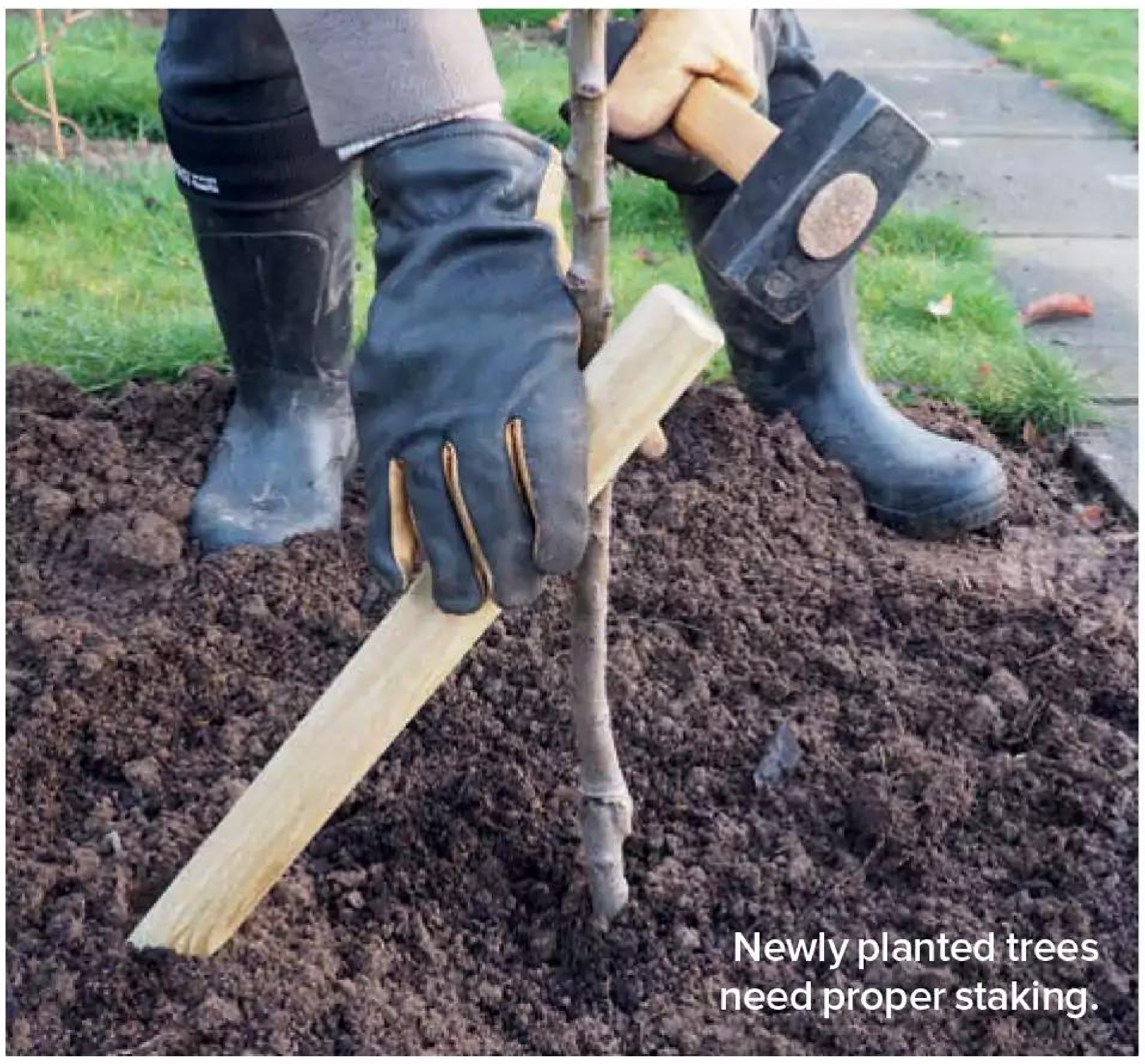
Planting trees in autumn allows roots to establish before the demands of leaf growth in spring

Tree planting success

When planting trees, stake them low (about 30cm off the ground) to allow movement in the breeze, which encourages the trunk to thicken. Angle stakes away from the prevailing wind. For clay soils, dig square holes to help the roots penetrate the sides more easily.



In clay soils, dig square holes to help root growth.



Newly planted trees need proper staking.

Container growing

If you're looking for a way to garden with limited space, container growing is ideal

Container growing is popular due to the sheer variety of plants you can grow. From vibrant summer bedding to evergreen shrubs and even small trees – the range is huge.

Most container plants will thrive on patios, balconies, and in small gardens, creating striking combinations or bringing privacy to overlooked spaces. Plant a late-flowering perennial in spring and your container will bloom that summer.

While summer displays are best-known, winter options bring life to your garden too. *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella' offers red buds from autumn to winter, followed by fragrant spring flowers, while *Carex testacea* turns coppery-orange in autumn and winter. Add decorative trailing ivies, maybe a small evergreen, and underplant with spring-flowering bulbs, and you've got a pot full of long-term visual interest.

With planning, you can have containers blooming year-round. Choose three plants spanning different seasons for long-lasting colour without sacrificing space.

Temperature extremes can cause issues, so it's important to keep an eye on not only the plants, but the containers themselves. In winter, terracotta pots may need to be wrapped in a protective covering, or moved to a light, frost-free location.

Top tip

Rejuvenate overgrown plants by removing most top growth. This encourages new shoots, though you'll miss one season's flowers

PLANTING

Container plants need the right light – full sun or partial shade. Spring planting is common but requires careful watering in the first summer.

Preparation steps:

1. Choose a pot 1-2 inches larger than current container, with drainage holes.
2. Add crocks or gravel for drainage.
3. Use quality potting mix.
4. Fill container one-third full.
5. Place plant at same depth as the original pot.
6. Fill with mix, firm gently.
7. Leave 1-inch space for watering.
8. Water thoroughly, add mulch.

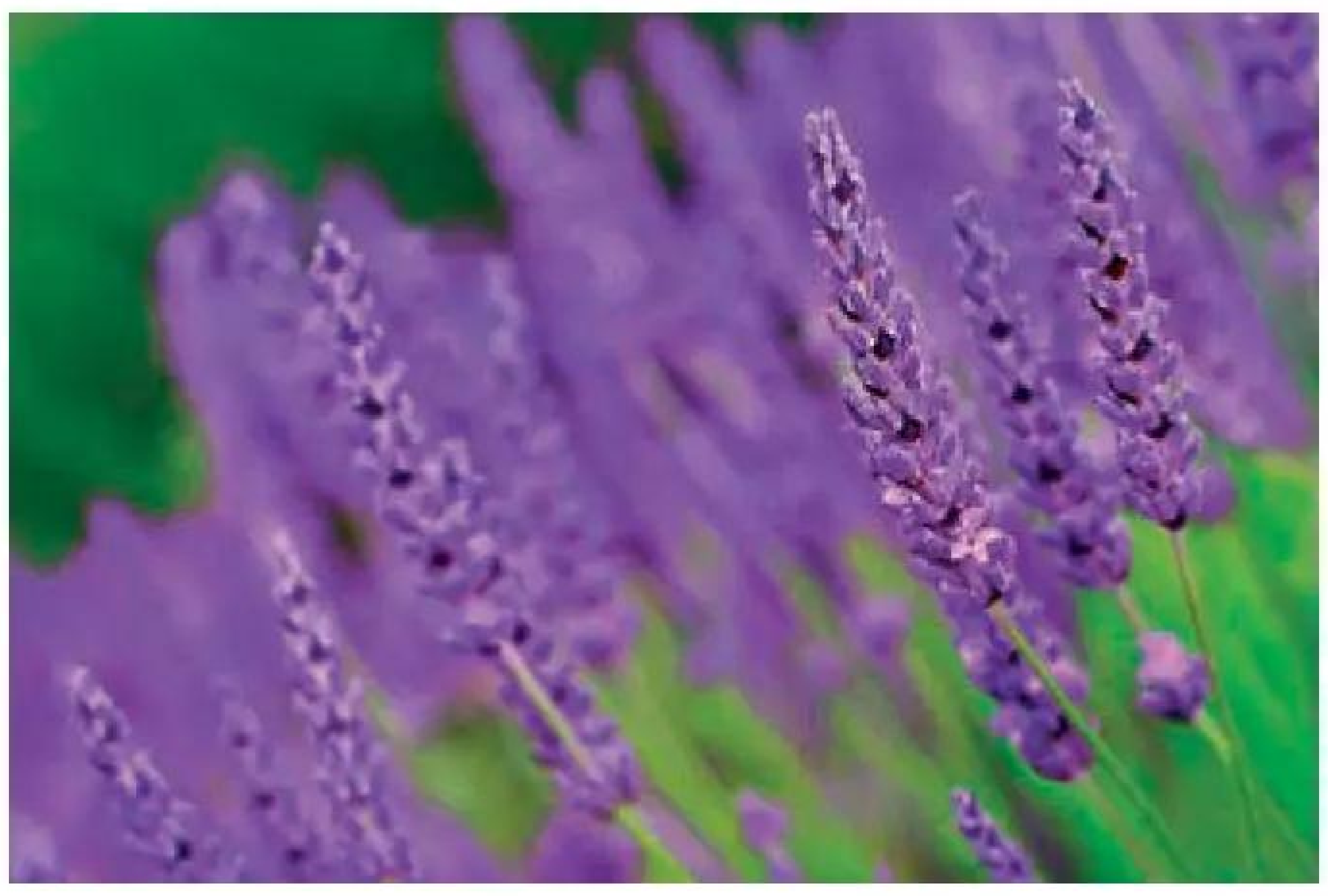
PROPAGATION

Taking cuttings of the plants in your containers is simple and reliable:

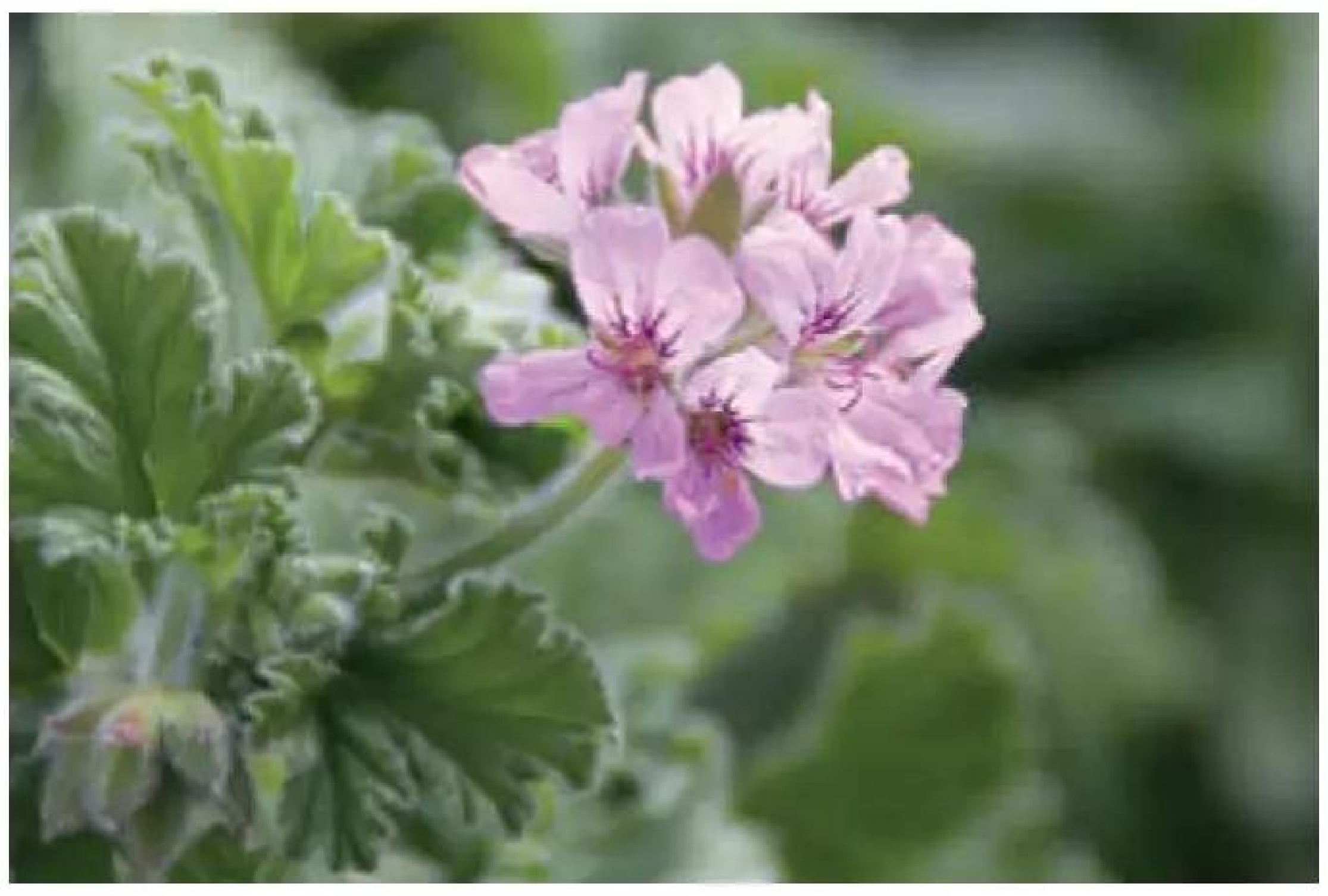
1. Select healthy, non-flowering stem (3-4 leaf sets) in spring/summer.
2. Cut below leaf node, remove lower leaves.
3. Dip in rooting powder.
4. Plant in potting soil/perlite mix.
5. Cover with clear plastic bag.
6. Place in warm, bright spot (no direct sun).
7. Water when dry.
8. Test for roots after 4-6 weeks.
9. Remove bag when rooted.
10. Grow on before final planting.

Did you know? Evergreens offer year-round interest and structure. Use one as an anchor plant and change supporting plants seasonally

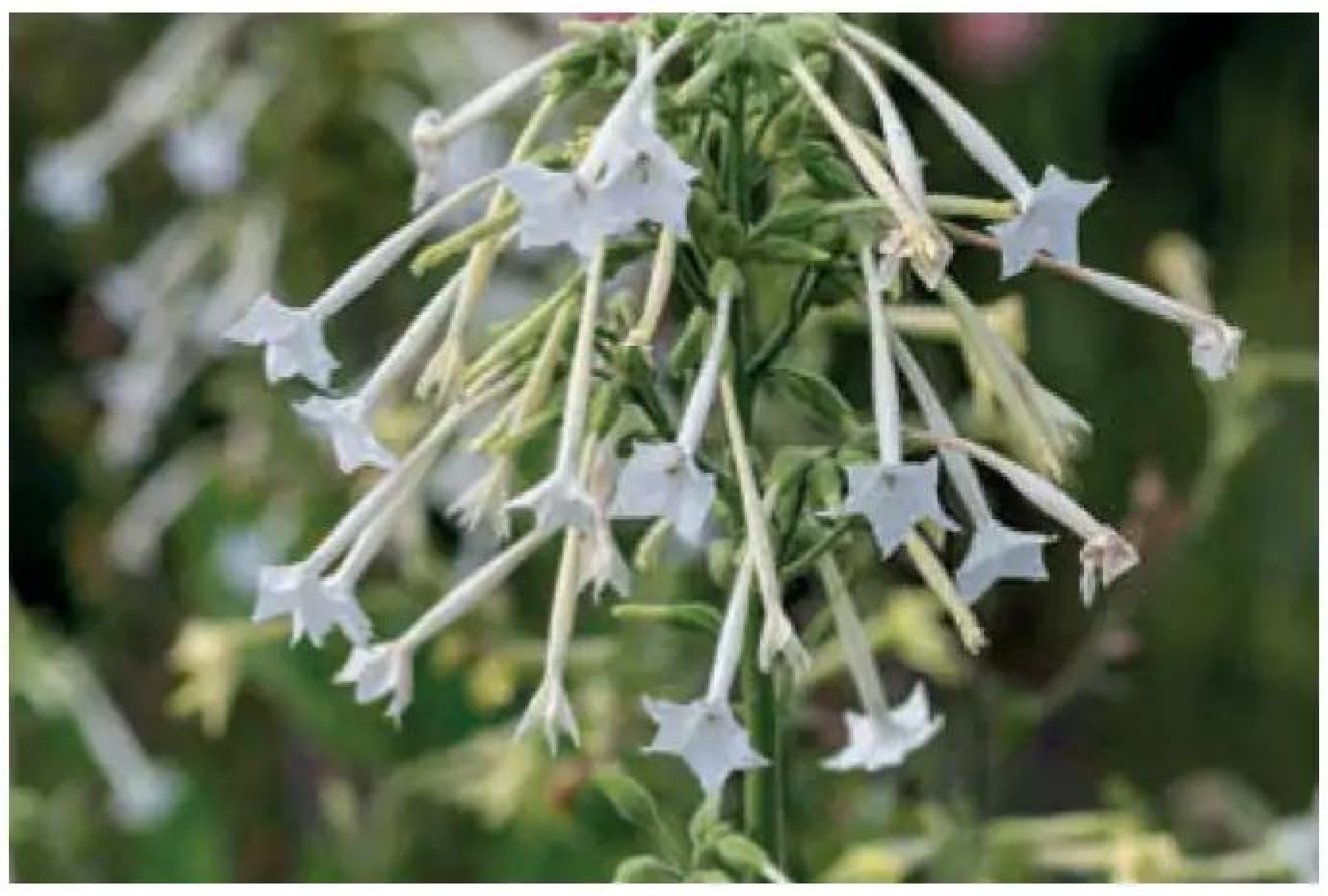
THREE FRAGRANT OPTIONS



***Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote'**
Fragrant purple spikes, silvery foliage. Sunny spots. **Flowers:** Jun-Aug. **HxS:** 24x24in (60x60cm).



***Pelargonium* 'Attar of Roses'**
Rose-scented leaves, pink flowers. Warm, sunny areas. **Flowers:** May-Sep. **HxS:** 18x18in (45x45cm).



Nicotiana sylvestris
Tall, tubular white flowers. Evening fragrance. **Flowers:** Jul-Oct. **HxS:** 5ftx2ft (150x60cm).

Take 3 containers... and enjoy flowers month after month

Combination 1

SPRING: *Malus* 'Jelly King' ('Mattfru') AGM
Tough, reliable tree. Spring flowers, autumn fruits. **Flowers:** May. **H&S**: 13ft (4m).

SUMMER: *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Little Goldstar'
Yellow daisy-like flowers. Attracts pollinators. **Flowers:** Jul-Oct. **HxS:** 20x16in (50x40cm).

AUTUMN: *Carex testacea*
Evergreen grass, coppery-orange in autumn/winter. Year-round interest. **H&S:** 28x24in (70x60cm).

Combination 2

SPRING: *Acer platanoides* 'Crimson Queen' AGM
Compact Japanese maple. Burgundy to crimson-red leaves. **H&S:** 10ft (3m).

SUMMER: *Dahlia* 'Totally Tangerine'
Long-flowering. Pink petals, orange centre. **Flowers:** Jul-Nov. **HxS:** 2-2½ft (60x75cm).

AUTUMN: *Heuchera* 'Forever Purple'
Glossy purple leaves, pink flowers. **Flowers:** Jun-Aug. **H&S:** 20in (50cm).

Combination 3

SPRING: *Stipa tenuissima* AGM
Tough grass for sun. Flowers till September, seedheads for autumn. **Flowers:** Jun-Sep. **HxS:** 2x1ft (60x30cm).

SHUTTERSTOCK

SUMMER: *Canna* 'Wyoming' AGM
The stunning apricot-orange flowers of 'Wyoming' contrast beautifully with its dark leaves. Plant in full sun. **H:** 5ft (1½m).

AUTUMN: *Skimmia japonica* 'Rubella' AGM
Red buds (autumn-winter), white flowers (spring). Likes partial shade. **Flowers:** Apr-May. **H&S:** 4ft (1.2m).

PRUNING

It's just as important to prune plants in containers and pots as it is for those in borders. In fact, you could argue that due to the limited space, it's even more important to maintain the shape and size of container plants, and pruning will encourage growth and sometimes a second flush of flowers:

- **Annuals/tender perennials:** Deadhead regularly. Remove at season's end.
- **Herbaceous perennials:** Cut back dead foliage in late autumn/early spring.
- **Shrubs:** Prune late winter/early spring. Remove dead/diseased branches.
- **Trees:** Prune late winter/early spring.

Remember...

Prune spring-flowering shrubs after blooming to preserve next year's buds

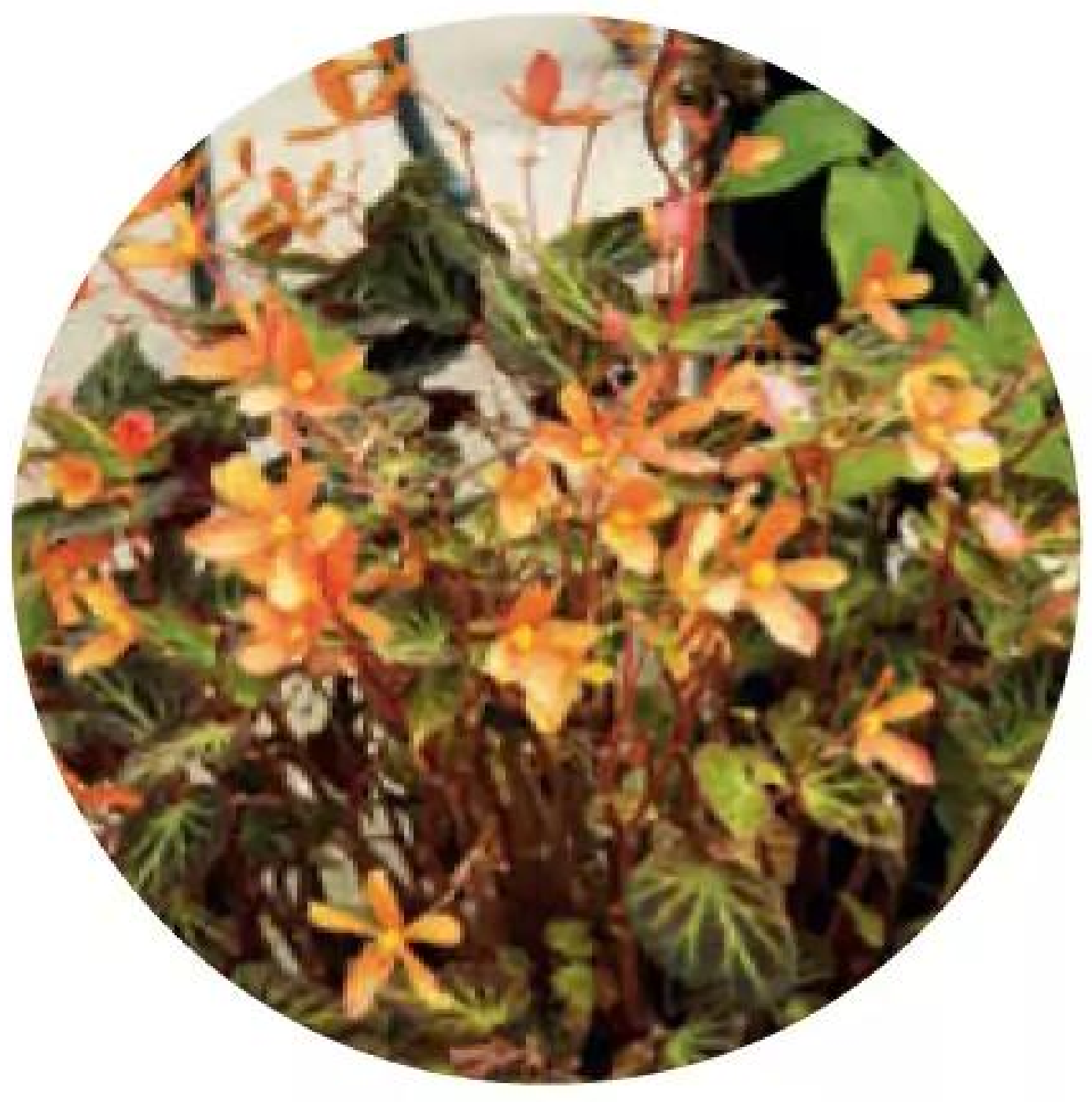
Seasonal care

- **Spring/summer:** Feed during growth. Water daily if needed.
- **Autumn:** Reduce feeding and watering.
- **Winter:** Stop feeding.Water sparingly. Protect tender plants from frost.

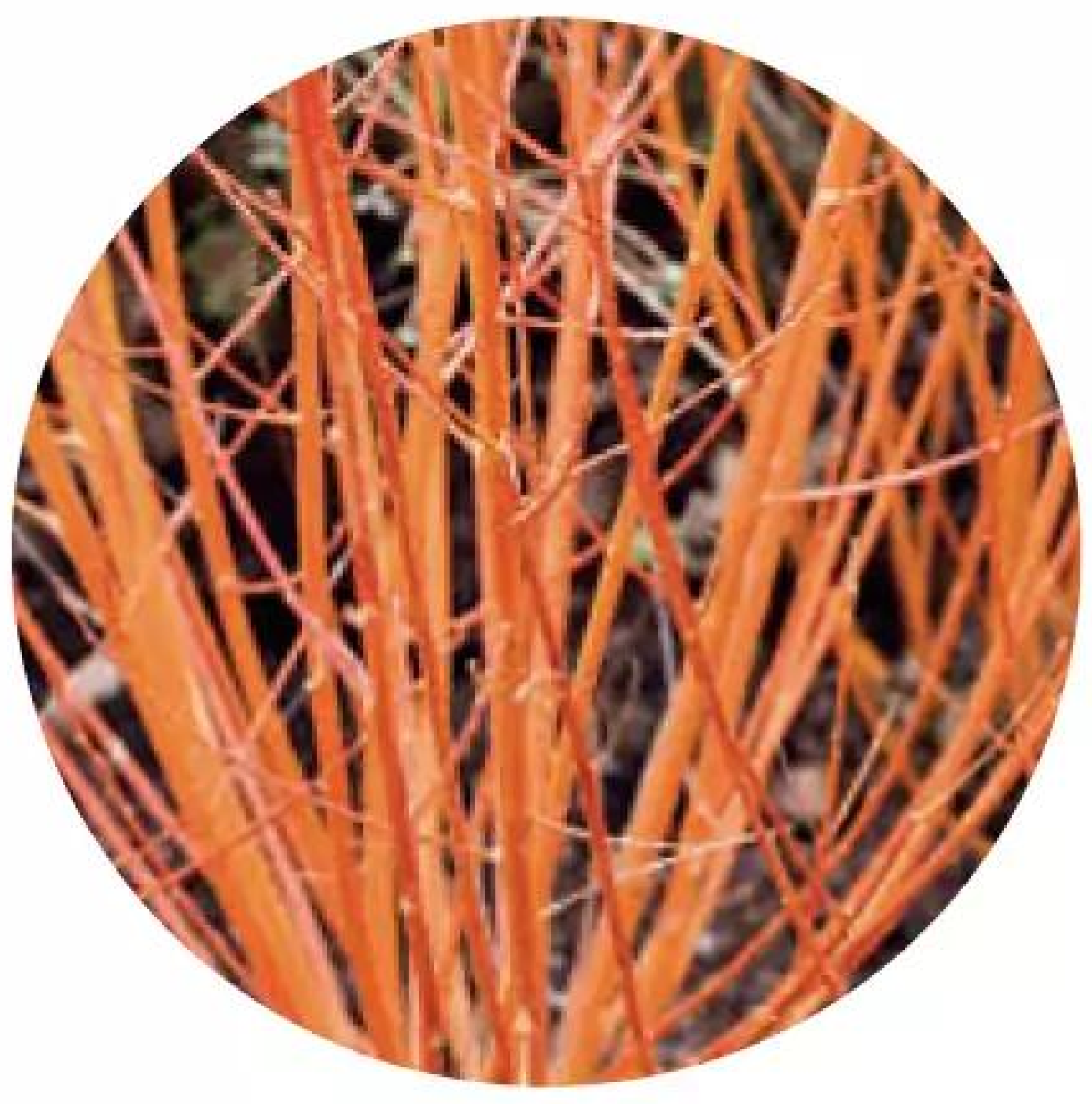
Container types

Some containers favour form over function, and even those that are practical need some thought. Our climate can produce extreme temperatures, so opt for stoneware pots resistant to freezing. Terracotta and earthenware are prone to spalling in sub-zero conditions, but can be used with care. Glazed pots retain moisture better, while unglazed allow for air exchange, but can dry out more quickly. Choose light-coloured pots for hot areas and heavy ones for windy spots. In autumn, protect from excessive rain to reduce the risk of waterlogging. Remember, adequate drainage is crucial – stand pots on feet. For summer, consider the pot material and colour. Dark pots absorb heat, potentially stressing roots, while light ones reflect it. Plastic pots are lightweight and retain moisture well, but may not suit all garden styles. Wooden planters look natural but will require treatment to prevent rot, and metal containers can get very hot if they're sited in full sun, risking overheated roots.

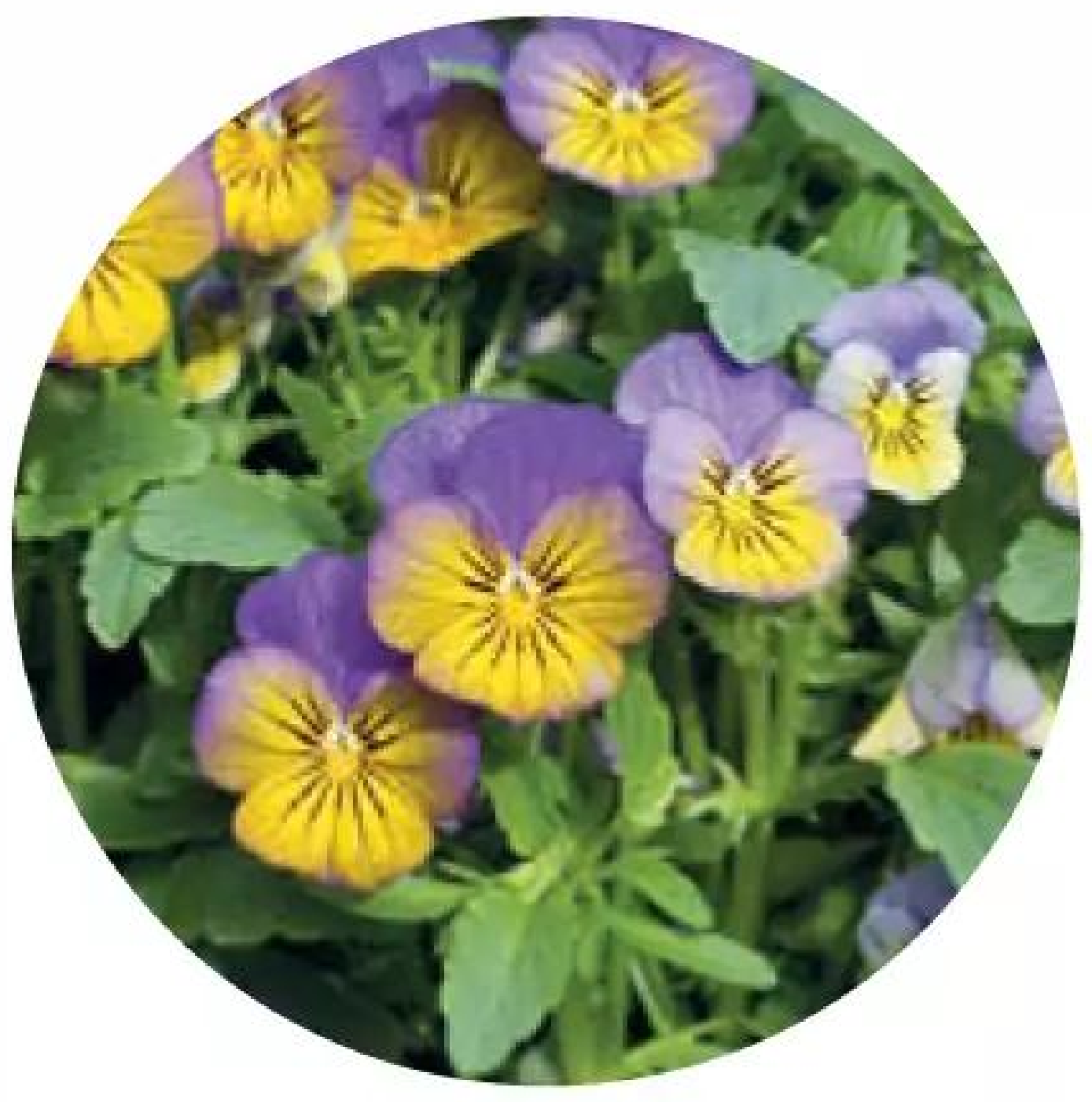
3 perfect picks for pots



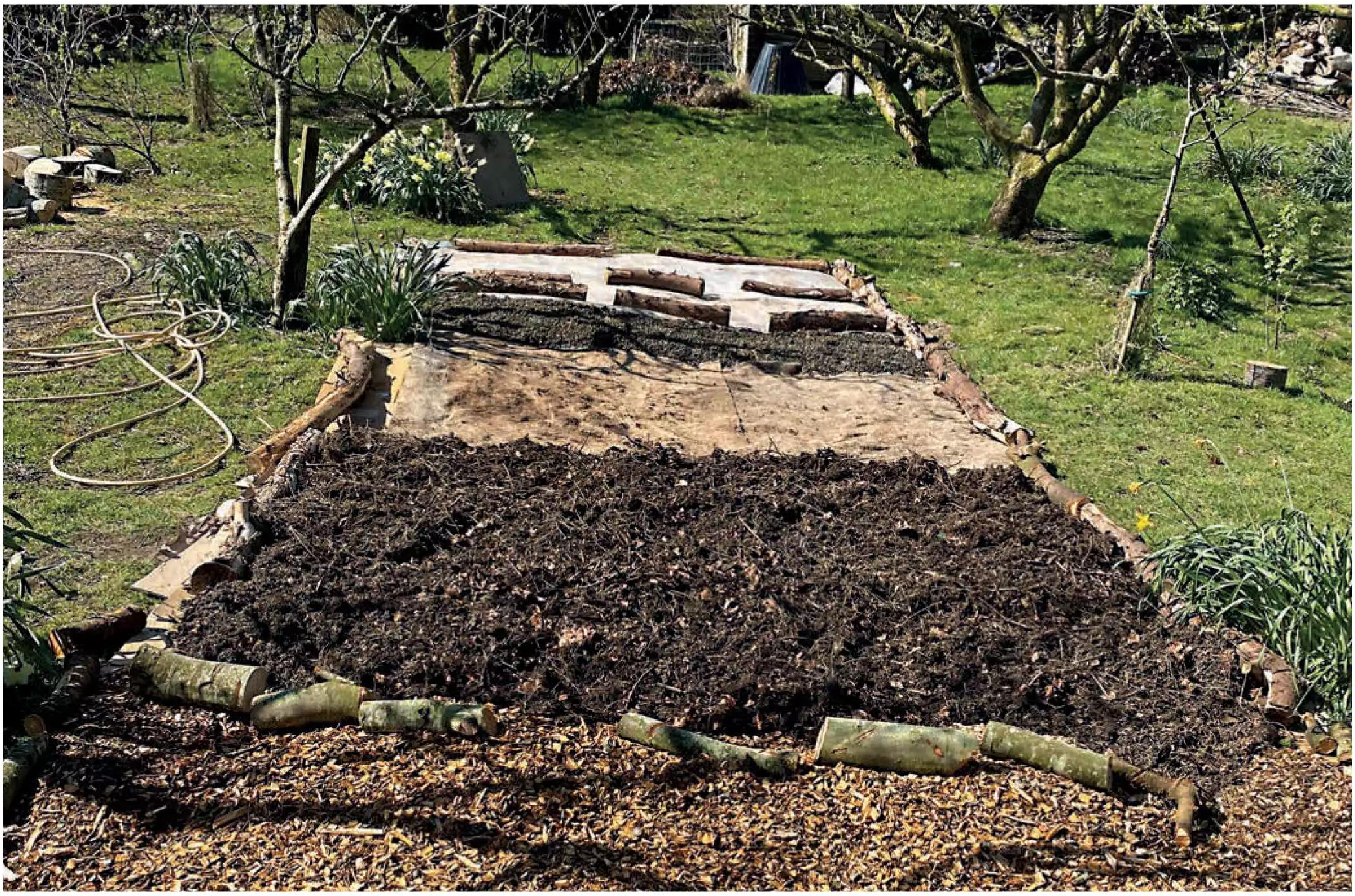
***Begonia* 'Glowing Embers' AGM:** Tangerine-orange flowers, dark foliage. Sun/semi-shade. Flowers: Jul-Nov. H: 1ft (30cm).



***Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire':** Colourful autumn leaves, bright winter stems. H&S: 6½ft (2m).



Winter-flowering violas: Tolerates autumn weather. Try 'Phantom' or 'Sorbet Morpho'. Flowers: Oct-Feb. HxS: 6in (15cm).



The 'no dig' method

Simple, low-impact gardening that benefits the soil biome, and makes things easier for you!

Allowing the soil structure to remain intact (and undisturbed through digging) means that there is better drainage. Microscopic channels created by soil life including mycorrhizal fungi allow water to freely drain away naturally, and you can walk on beds – even after flooding – without compacting them.

Grow no-dig

Probably the simplest and most effective way to protect your soil, make it more resilient to changing weather and grow amazing crops, this ancient method of gardening varies according to the environment where you live. It involves simply spreading organic matter (a mulch) on the surface of the soil, and allowing the soil organisms to incorporate it. So if you've been digging your plot, all you need to do is stop digging, spread a mulch (compost works well in the UK) and get growing!

To transform weedy grass into a productive garden, remove any woody weeds such as brambles with a spade, cut the grass on a low setting, cover with cardboard (overlapping to prevent weeds sneaking through) and then cover that with around 5cm compost. Any kind of compost is fine. You can sow and plant directly into this.

Every year add a little compost

Did you know...

'Green manures' such as Phacelia break up the soil with their roots while they're growing, then add nutrients and organic matter when they die back mulch to the beds, which feeds the soil life, and this in turn feeds the plants.

No-dig is about not turning the soil over annually, although of course there will be times when you'll need to dig, eg when planting shrubs and trees.

Make compost!

The ultimate in recycling, try to compost everything you can. It's worth asking neighbours for composting materials – grass clippings, brown card, vegetarian animal bedding (rabbits, guinea pigs), old leaves – to boost your compost heaps.

If you have the space, look into composting your food waste. A simple system is Bokashi, fermenting food waste in containers, so that it is not enticing to vermin. Once it is ready, add to the regular compost heap to finish maturing. There are also hot composting systems which can handle almost all food waste, turning it into compost in around three months.

Mulch, mulch, mulch

A mulch is organic matter which is spread on the surface of the soil to protect and feed it. In the UK, (officially the land of the slug), a compost mulch is ideal as it does not create a habitat for them. This can be homemade compost, composted manure, or bought from a compost producer.

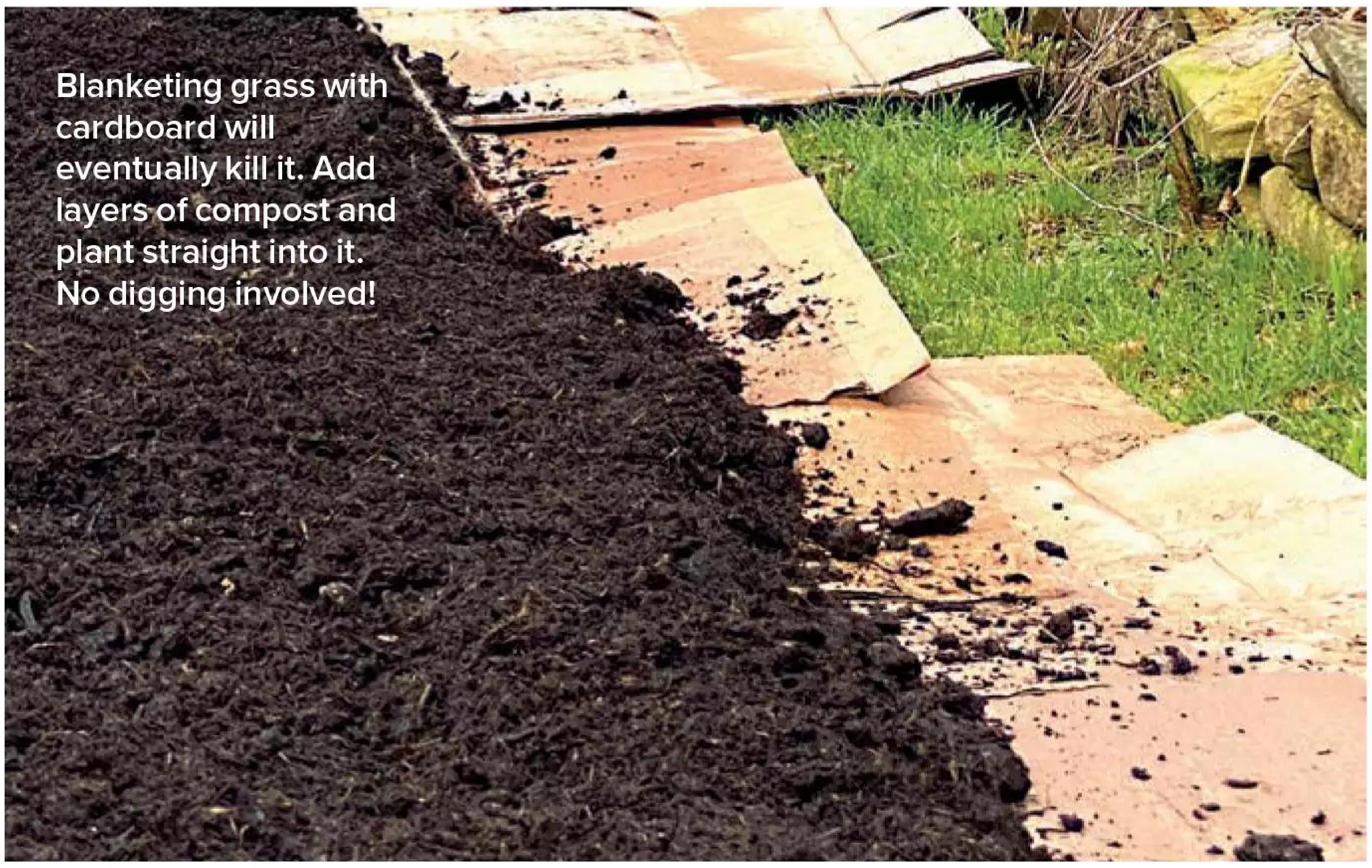
Natural...

Using 'no-dig', the complex network of fungal hyphae and soil aggregates remains intact, supporting beneficial microorganisms

All mulches help to protect soil against weather extremes, and different types include:

✿ **Grass clippings** – ideal for locking in moisture, protecting larger plants during hot, dry spells. In wet weather it can become a slug habitat, so it's not ideal for young, tender plants.

✿ **Wood chip** – a fantastic free resource, wood chip works especially well with soil fungi. Ideal for paths or spreading under shrubs and trees. Composted wood chip is ideal as a mulch or to make your own potting compost.



Blanketing grass with cardboard will eventually kill it. Add layers of compost and plant straight into it. No digging involved!

✿ **Sheep fleece** – this can be from the farm, or use the wool packing which often comes with frozen deliveries (remove the plastic first). Fleece helps to prevent moisture evaporating, and gradually breaks down over around two years, feeding the soil as it does. It can help prevent slugs (but not always). Ideal for making new no-dig beds spread on cardboard, and for larger plants such as shrubs.

✿ **Straw** – this is ideal for mulching larger plants (but it can become a slug habitat in wet weather). Best avoided in a windy location as it blows away easily!

✿ **Chop and drop** – cutting down leafy matter and laying on the surface, this is a quick, free way to lock moisture into the soil. Any leafy plant is fine, although nutrient-rich comfrey is especially good. Again, in damp weather this can become sluggy, so keep an eye out for that.

✿ **Leafmould** – fallen leaves are a natural mulch for the garden, and it's worth leaving them where they fall under trees and around shrubs. Wet leaves are a slip hazard, so remove them from paths and walkways, and pile them up to make leafmould. This takes around two years form a crumbly, nutritious soil-improver.

✿ **Green manures** – plants that are grown alongside crops to increase fertility. Widely available from most seed companies, they're an affordable way to improve and protect soil. Keeping roots in the soil as much as possible helps to conserve soil structure and increases biodiversity above and below the ground. Soil with plants in is more resilient to extremes of weather and creates habitat for wildlife to live in and forage.

For no-dig gardens, choose green manures that are easy to hoe off or that will die in winter frosts. For the spring, ideal green manures are *Phacelia*, crimson clover, Persian clover, buckwheat and agricultural lupins. These all produce flowers that are magnets for bees, too.

No-dig can't prevent waterlogging in areas that are prone to heavy and persistent flooding (those areas require proper drainage, or raised beds, or both), but it can help in other ways, allowing soil to be as nature intended, full of nutrients and with a diverse microorganism biome.

Pruning: a guide to healthier plants

Pruning might sound a bit daunting, but it's one of the best things you can do to keep your garden looking its best. Whether you're working with plants, shrubs, or small ornamental trees, a little bit of snipping here and there can make all the difference. Let's dive into some tips and tricks for pruning, to help your garden stay healthy, tidy, and full of life.

Why prune?

Before we get into the how-tos, it's worth understanding why we prune in the first place. Pruning helps control the size and shape of your plants, preventing them from becoming too leggy or sprawling out of control. It also encourages new growth and can increase the number of flowers or fruits your plants produce. Dead or diseased branches are best removed to prevent them from affecting the rest of the plant. So, while it might feel a bit ruthless to chop bits off your beloved garden, it's all for the greater good, and can be quite cathartic, too!

Remove dead stems from perennials to allow new growth to flourish.

Top tip If you're unsure, the general rule of thumb is to prune after flowering for spring bloomers and in late winter or early spring for summer bloomers

When to prune

Timing is key when it comes to pruning. Most shrubs and small trees are best pruned in late winter or early spring before new growth starts. This is when the plant is dormant, making it less likely to be stressed by a trim. However, some plants, particularly those that flower in spring, should be pruned just after they finish flowering. If you prune these early in the year, you'll cut off the buds before they've had a chance to bloom.

For example, forsythia and lilac are best left until after their spring show. On the other hand, summer-flowering shrubs like roses and buddleia benefit from a spring pruning to encourage more blooms later in the season.

HOW TO PRUNE

First, make sure your tools are sharp and clean. Blunt tools can damage the plant, leaving it susceptible to disease. You'll need a good pair of secateurs for most jobs, and some loppers or a pruning saw for thicker branches.

✿ Shrubs and small trees

Start by removing any dead, damaged, or diseased stems/branches. These are usually easy to spot – they look dried out, discoloured, or may have a different texture. Cut them back to healthy wood, making a clean cut just above a bud or where the branch meets another.

Next, thin out any crowded areas to allow light and air to reach the centre of the plant. This is particularly important for shrubs like hydrangeas and roses, which can suffer from mildew if they're too densely packed. Aim to remove about a third of the old wood each year to keep the plant youthful and vigorous.

Finally, shape your plant. For formal shapes, like box hedges or topiary, regular light trimming is better than an occasional heavy prune. For more natural-looking plants, just remove the bits that spoil the shape or are growing in an odd direction.

✿ Perennials

Many perennial plants benefit from a trim at various times of the year to promote healthy growth, extend their blooming season, and keep them looking tidy. Some perennials will thrive with regular trimming, including:

- **Geraniums (Cranesbills)**
- **Penstemon**
- ***Alchemilla mollis* (Lady's Mantle)**
- **Salvia**
- **Echinacea (Coneflower)**
- **Hemerocallis (Daylilies)**
- **Hostas**
- **Delphinium**
- **Nepeta (Catmint)**
- **Achillea (Yarrow)**
- **Campanula (Bellflower)**
- **Astrantia (Masterwort)**

Top tip

Always cut just above an outward-facing bud. This encourages the plant to grow out rather than into the centre, keeping it airy, well-shaped and disease-free

Did you know? Pruning plants in the morning can be beneficial to their health. It allows the cut surfaces to dry quickly in the sun, reducing the risk of fungal infections

Pruning with shears

Some plants benefit from a slightly different approach. These plants thrive when cut back with shears rather than precision tools like secateurs.

- **Lavender:** Once your lavender has finished flowering, usually in late summer, give it a light trim with shears. Aim to remove the spent flowers and a few centimetres of the soft green growth below. Be careful not to cut into the old wood, as lavender doesn't regenerate well from it.
- **Heather:** Prune heather in early spring or right after flowering in late summer. Shearing off the top third of the plant helps maintain a compact shape and encourages fresh, vibrant growth.
- ***Clematis montana*:** Prune immediately after it has finished flowering in late spring. Use shears to remove any dead or tangled growth and to cut back the plant to fit its space. Don't worry about being too precise – *Clematis montana* is forgiving and will bounce back quickly.
- **Perovskia** (Russian Sage): Give this a hard shearing in late winter or early spring to keep it from getting too leggy and to encourage new growth.
- **Santolina** (Cotton Lavender): This benefits from a good shearing after flowering in late summer to maintain its compact, rounded shape.
- **Escallonia**: Shear lightly after flowering in late summer.

Tip: Remember to keep your shears sharp for the best results!

Tool hygiene

It's easy to forget, but keeping your tools clean is just as important as knowing when and how to prune. Dirty tools can spread diseases from one plant to another, turning your well-intentioned pruning session into a nightmare for your garden. After each use, especially when cutting diseased or damaged branches, disinfect your tools with a simple solution of diluted bleach (about one part bleach to nine parts water) or rubbing alcohol. A quick dip or wipe-down will do the trick. Make sure to dry your tools thoroughly afterwards to prevent rust.

Propagation – Let them grow!

Propagation is one of the most rewarding aspects of gardening. Not only is it a cost-effective way to increase your plant stock, but it's also a fascinating process that allows you to witness the miracle of plant growth firsthand. There are four main methods of propagation: sowing seeds, taking cuttings, layering, and division.

SOWING SEEDS

Seed sowing is perhaps the most common method of propagation. It's particularly useful for annual plants and many perennials.

Key steps:

1. Choose a high-quality, peat-free seed compost. Sieve the compost to remove any large chunks.
2. Fill your containers, leaving space at the top for watering.
3. Sow seeds according to packet instructions.
4. Cover with a thin layer of compost or vermiculite (refer to the instructions on the packet; some seeds need light to germinate).
5. Water gently and place in a warm location.

DIRECT SOWING

Direct sowing is an excellent method for hardy flowering plants that don't mind a bit of a chill. It's a great time-saver since you can sow seeds directly where you want them to grow, bypassing the need for transplanting.

Steps for direct sowing:

1. Prepare the soil by removing weeds and breaking up large clods of earth. Rake the soil to a fine tilth (a crumbly texture).
2. Mark out where you'll be sowing, either in rows or drifts, depending on your design.
3. Sow seeds according to the instructions on the packet, ensuring you plant them at the correct depth.
4. Water the area gently to settle the soil around the seeds.
5. Keep the area moist until seedlings are established.

Plants suitable for direct sowing

- **Poppies (*Papaver*):** Tip: If sowing in autumn, you may need to protect young seedlings from frost with fleece
- **Cornflowers (*Centaurea cyanus*):** Tip: Thin seedlings if they are too crowded to give them room to grow strong and healthy.
- **Nigella (*Nigella damascena*):** Tip: These are self-seeding plants, so deadheading regularly will prevent them from spreading too much unless you want them to self-seed.
- **Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*):** Tip: Use slug deterrents (like copper tape, crushed eggshells, or organic slug pellets) to protect seedlings from being eaten.
- **Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*):** Tip: As they grow tall, sunflowers may need staking to prevent them from being blown over in windy conditions.

Top tip

Direct sowing works best for plants that are quick to germinate and establish. It's often done in spring after the risk of frost has passed, but some hardy annuals can be sown in autumn to flower the following year

DIVISION

Division is the simplest way to increase the number of plants, and is typically used for herbaceous perennials that form clumps.

When to divide

Spring-flowering plants: Divide in early autumn. **Summer and autumn-flowering plants:** Divide in spring.

Steps:

1. Dig up the entire plant.
2. Gently pull or cut the plant into smaller sections, each with roots and shoots. Bigger clumps can be split with a spade.
3. Replant the divisions immediately and water well.

Plants suitable for division

Hostas, daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), ornamental grasses, astilbe, phlox, heuchera.

LAYERING

Layering is where new roots are encouraged to form on a stem while it's still attached to the parent plant. It's particularly useful for plants that are difficult to root from cuttings and is best done in spring or early summer when plants are in active growth.

Types of layering

✿ **Simple layering:** Bending a low branch to the ground and partially burying it. Suitable for rhododendron, magnolia, cotoneaster

✿ **Tip layering:** Burying the tip of a stem, often used for trailing plants. Suitable for forsythia, honeysuckle, climbing roses

✿ **Air layering:** Used when branches can't be bent to the ground, it involves wounding a stem and wrapping it with moist moss. Suitable for apple trees, pear trees, viburnum

Steps for simple layering:

1. Choose a flexible, low-growing branch.
2. Make a small wound on the underside of the stem where it will touch the ground.
3. Bury this section of stem, keeping the growing tip above ground.
4. Secure with a wire pin or stone.
5. Keep the soil moist.

Did you know? Some plants, like lavender, can be propagated by cutting the stems into sections and planting them directly into the ground or compost

TAKING CUTTINGS

Cuttings are an excellent way to propagate many shrubs, perennials, and even some trees. There are several types of cuttings:

✿ **Softwood:** Taken in spring from new, soft growth.

✿ **Semi-ripe:** Taken in late summer from this year's growth.

✿ **Hardwood:** Taken in autumn and winter from mature stems.

✿ **Leaf:** Useful for plants like primroses and foxgloves.

✿ **Leaf-bud:** Consist of a leaf, its stalk, and a short piece of stem.

General steps for stem cuttings:

1. Choose healthy, disease-free parent plants.
2. Cut just below a leaf node at a 45-degree angle.
3. Remove lower leaves and trim large leaves by half.
4. Dip the cut end in rooting hormone (optional but helpful).
5. Insert into a pot filled with free-draining compost.
6. Water well and cover with a clear plastic bag to maintain humidity.

Plants suitable for cuttings

Softwood: Lavender, verbena, sweet pea

Semi-ripe: Roses, fuchsia, hydrangea, hebe, cistus, buddleia.

Hardwood: Forsythia, weigela, cornus.

Leaf: Primrose, foxglove, lungwort.

Leaf-bud: Clematis, honeysuckle.

Troubleshooting

Seed problems:

- **Damping off:** A fungal disease causes seedlings to collapse. Prevent by using sterile compost, avoiding overwatering, and ensuring good air circulation.
- **Poor germination:** Check seed viability, temperature needs, and planting depth.

Cutting issues:

- **Rotting:** Ensure cuttings aren't too wet. Remove any dead material promptly.
- **Slow rooting:** Some plants take longer to root. Be patient and maintain consistent conditions.

Layering challenges:

- **No roots forming:** Check that the wound hasn't healed over. Re-wound if necessary.
- **Drying out:** Ensure the layered section stays consistently moist.

Division difficulties:

- **Plants failing to thrive:** Ensure each division has enough roots and shoots. Water well after replanting.
- **Flowering reduced:** Some plants may take a year to recover from division before flowering well again.

Additional tips

- **Hygiene:** Always use clean, sharp tools to prevent disease spread.
- **Patience:** Some plants take longer to root or germinate than others. Don't give up too soon!
- **Record-keeping:** Keep notes on your successes and failures to improve your techniques over time.

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Supporting wildlife in your garden

Creating a wildlife-friendly garden is not only a rewarding experience but also a crucial step in supporting local ecosystems. By making a few simple changes and additions to your outdoor space, you can provide a haven for a diverse range of creatures, from birds and amphibians to insects and small mammals. There are some practical things you can do to nurture wildlife in your garden that will benefit both them, and your plants. Many visitors will help you by eating pests!

Birds

These are often the most visible and audible wildlife in our gardens, bringing colour and song throughout the year. To attract and support these feathered friends:

1. Provide a variety of food sources: Offer seeds, nuts, and fat balls in feeders, and consider planting berry-bearing shrubs for natural food.

2. Install bird baths: Fresh water is essential for drinking and bathing. Place baths at different heights to cater to various species.

3. Create nesting opportunities: Put up nest boxes and leave some areas of your garden slightly wilder, with dense shrubs or climbers.

4. Plant for shelter: Trees and hedges offer protection from predators and harsh weather.

Did you know? A pair of blue tits feeding their chicks will need to find up to 10,000 small creatures in just three weeks! By creating an insect-friendly garden, you're indirectly supporting bird populations too

Insects

Insects are the unsung heroes of our gardens, playing crucial roles in pollination, pest control, and as a food source for other wildlife. Here's how to support them:

1. Plant for pollinators: Include a variety of nectar-rich flowers that bloom throughout the seasons. Native wildflowers are particularly beneficial.

2. Create insect hotels: Build or buy insect houses with different-sized holes to provide nesting sites for solitary bees and other beneficial insects.

3. Leave some 'mess': Dead wood, leaf litter, and unmown areas provide valuable habitats for many insect species.

4. Avoid pesticides: These can harm beneficial insects along with pests. Instead, practice companion planting and encourage natural predators.

Top tip If you spot small mounds of soil with a central hole, they could be the burrows of tawny mining bees. These solitary bees are excellent pollinators, so try to avoid disturbing their nests

An insect hotel provides a safe place in which to overwinter.

Did you know? Leopard slugs can grow up to 16cm long, making them easy to spot and differentiate from other slug species

Slugs and snails: friend or foe?

While often considered garden pests, not all slugs and snails are detrimental to your plants, and some species play important roles in the ecosystem.

1. Leopard slugs (*Limax maximus*): These distinctive grey slugs with black markings are actually beneficial. They primarily eat dead plant matter, fungi, and even prey on other slug species and their eggs.

2. Create slug-friendly areas: Leave some areas of your garden slightly wild, with leaf litter and log piles where slugs can shelter. Maybe they'll stay there!

3. Natural control: Encourage natural predators like hedgehogs, birds, and amphibians that eat slugs

4. Targeted protection: Instead of widespread slug pellets, use barriers around specific plants you want to protect.

Amphibians

Frogs, toads, and newts are not only fascinating creatures but also excellent natural pest controllers. Here's how to make your garden amphibian-friendly:

1. Build a pond: Even a small water feature can attract amphibians. Ensure there are shallow areas and easy access in and out of the water.
2. Create damp, shady areas: Log piles, leaf litter, and dense vegetation provide shelter and hibernation spots.
3. Avoid chemicals: Pesticides and herbicides can harm amphibians' sensitive skin.
4. Be patient: It may take time for amphibians to find your garden, but once they do, they'll likely return year after year.

Top tip

When cleaning out your pond, leave the removed vegetation on the side for 48 hours. This allows any trapped creatures to make their way back to the water

Even a small water feature can support a lot of diverse wildlife.

Small mammals

Hedgehogs, mice, and voles all play important roles in the garden ecosystem. Here's how to make your garden mammal-friendly:

1. Create access: Make small holes (about the size of a CD) in fences to allow hedgehogs to move between gardens.
2. Provide shelter: Log piles, leaf heaps, and purpose-built hedgehog houses offer safe spaces for mammals to nest and hibernate.
3. Be careful with tools: Check areas before strimming or mowing, as hedgehogs and other small mammals may be sheltering there.
4. Offer food and water: While mammals should find natural food in a wildlife-friendly garden, you can supplement with specially formulated hedgehog food or meaty pet food. Always provide fresh water.

Top tip

Avoid using slug pellets, as these can harm hedgehogs and other wildlife that eat slugs and snails

3 ways to... encourage wildlife

Embrace diversity Plant a wide range of trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, bulbs, grasses, and ferns to attract a variety of wildlife.

Create different habitats
Include areas of long grass, wildflower meadows and woodland-style planting to cater to different species.

Provide water
Whether it's a pond, a small water feature, or even just a shallow dish with pebbles, water is essential for all wildlife.

Go organic
Avoid chemical pesticides and herbicides, and work with nature.

SMALL SPACE?

Maximising plant and habitat diversity is key, but it's possible even in limited spaces.

Vertical gardening: Use wall-mounted planters or trellises for climbing plants.
Balcony pond: Create a mini-pond in a large, shallow container.
Insect hotels: Hang small bug boxes on walls or railings.
Herb garden: Grow pollinator-friendly herbs in pots or window boxes.
Bird feeders: Use window-mounted or railing-attached feeders.
Wildflower pots: Create mini-meadows in containers.
Green roof: Add plants to small shed or storage box roofs.
Seasonal planting: Combine spring bulbs, summer annuals, and winter-flowering shrubs in pots.
Log pile: Stack a few logs in a corner for insects and fungi.
Water sources: Include a small solar-powered fountain for moving water.
Night-scented plants: Grow evening primrose or nicotiana to attract moths, which are excellent pollinators.

Edible flowers

Easy, bee-friendly blooms for colour through the year – pick fresh petals for salads, cakes and drinks

Colour all year

✿ **Feb-March**: Start violas indoors; pot up for spring trays; sow dianthus (pinks/carnations) under cover.

✿ **April-May:** Direct sow nasturtium, borage, calendula, cornflower. Plant out dianthus.

✿ **June-Aug:** Peak picking; keep deadheading, feed weekly; sow Sweet William for next year.

✿ **Sep-Oct**: Late sowing of winter violas; dry cornflower/calendula petals. Overwinter young dianthus/ Sweet William.

✿ **Nov-Jan**: Pick winter violas on mild days.

General growing advice

✿ Sow: March–June (direct or modules); late summer for winter violas.

✿ Site: Sun/part shade; peat-free compost in containers.

✿ Feed: Light weekly liquid feed once flowering.

✿ Water: Keep evenly moist; avoid splashing petals just before picking.

✿ Keep them coming: Deadhead hard; shear leggy violas to refresh.

In the kitchen

Salads: Nasturtium + viola + herbs = colour, pepper and sweetness.

Cakes & puds: Press violas or rose petals onto frosted cakes; make candied petals with egg white + caster sugar, dry 24 hrs.

Drinks: Freeze borage or viola in ice cubes; rose/calendula syrups for spritzers.

Savoury: Chive florets on omelettes; calendula petals over roast veg/rice.

Pairing ideas

- Tomato + nasturtium
- Strawberries + rose
- Cucumber + borage
- New potatoes + chive flowers
- Courgette fritters + marigold
- Sponge cake + dianthus sugar

Quick recipes

✿ Edible-flower butter: 100g soft butter + 2 tbsp chopped petals (rose/viola/ calendula) + pinch salt. Chill, and slice.

✿Nasturtium pesto: Handful leaves + a few petals, garlic, nuts, oil, Parmesan.

✿ Rose sugar: Layer petals with caster sugar in a jar for 1–2 weeks; sieve.

Top tips

- Eat only correctly identified edible species
- Use unsprayed plants
- Remove bitter petal bases on marigold, rose and dianthus
- Trial a small amount first if you have allergies or sensitivities

Nine tasty treats... to grow and eat

VIOLA & PANSY

- Light, sweet, honeyed taste
- Salads, desserts, candied petals, ice cubes
- Cool-season stars, great in winter

CALENDULA

- Citrus-saffron, mildly peppery
- Sprinkle over eggs, rice, soups; colour oils and butter
- Remove pale base of petals

NASTURTIUM

- Peppery, leaves edible too
- Salads, open sandwiches; pickle green seeds as 'capers'
- Best flavour in poor soil; full sun

BORAGE

- Cool cucumber flavour
- Drinks, ice cubes, salads; garnish chilled soups
- Pop the black anthers for pure blue

CORNFLOWER

- Mild, slightly spicy
- Petal 'confetti' for cakes and salads; dries well
- Harvest when petals are fresh & vivid

ROSE

- Perfumed, from delicate to heady
- Sugars, syrups, jellies, panna cotta; scatter petals
- Remove white petal base

CHIVES

- Gentle onion flavour
- Break into florets for salads, eggs, potatoes
- Allow flowers to open, use fresh

TAGETES

- Citrusy, tangy; petals only
- Scatter over tacos, grilled veg, grain bowls
- Avoid the tough green base

DIANTHUS

- Sweet with a clove spice note
- Sprinkle on cakes, infuse sugars/syrups, garnish salads and drinks
- Use petals only (discard green calyx)

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